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HELEN TREVERYAN



HELEN TREVERYAN

OR

THE RULING RACE

BY

JOHN ROY

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II

London

MACMILLAN AND CO.

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1892

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CHAPTER XX

HOME AGAIN

GUY did what he was asked to do. He hesitated, of course, and he would have dearly liked at all events to see Helen before leaving India; but this would not have been altogether easy to manage, and after ascertaining that the leave was to be got, he made up his mind to go. To this resolution he was largely influenced by Mrs. Aylmer, who knew that Helen was in earnest, and felt that the sooner the thing was done the better.

Guy wrote a week in advance to his mother, and said he was coming, but he warned her that this meant no change in his feelings. 'As you wish it,' he wrote, 'I have asked for leave, but please do not misunderstand me. I cannot give Helen up, and Pitt Wright's lies only make me care the more for her. She is the only woman I can ever marry.'

Before the end of May Guy was on board the P. & O. steamer *Indus* in Bombay harbour. It had been a frightfully hot journey down by train. During

the day the sun beat through the roof and sides of the railway carriage, and seemed to beat into his very brain as he lay half undressed on the leather-covered seat, and even at night the heat was very oppressive. Bombay was comparatively cool, not more than 90° or so in the shade, and by the time he got on board ship he was happy again.

He stood leaning over the side, just before the start, thinking how short a time it seemed since he first saw that coast, and how much had happened to him. It was a curious scene. The deck amidships was covered with baggage and chairs. Passengers and their friends were gathered here and there in knots, while the stewards and lascars were at work about the gangways.

Close to Guy, on the same side of the ship, stood Colonel Jackson, lately a Civil officer in Berar, who was leaving India 'for good,' after thirty years of hard work. One or two old acquaintances who happened to be in Bombay had come to see him off; but he was not a Bombay man himself, and his only real friend was his native bearer, Sri Kishen, who had served him faithfully since he was a young man. Sri Kishen had cheated him throughout, in a small patient way, and Jackson had been very angry with him at times; but they had never parted, and now the two men stood looking at one another in a silent, lifelong farewell that was very pathetic.

Still more pathetic was the little group near the

stern—a man and his wife and small daughter, six or seven years old. All three looked white and ill, but the husband, a district officer, was going back alone to his work in an out-of-the-way station among the rice swamps, to manage a couple of million of Bengalis. He hoped to join the others ‘in a year or two,’ but he could not afford to go on leave yet. The child was sobbing on his shoulder, with her arms round his neck, and his wife was begging him to let them go back with him even now; but he only shook his head and tried to speak cheerily.

Near them was a young girl in widow’s mourning. She was alone, and was looking at them with envy. What was their sorrow to hers? She had come out hardly a year ago—a bride of nineteen, just married to Ronald Stewart of the Punjab Cavalry. And now Ronald Stewart was lying in a little desolate cemetery on the frontier, dead of typhoid fever, and she was going back to her people. Two or three young men were laughing and talking not far from her. Jenkinson of the Indo-Chinese Bank was going home on his first leave, and his friends were seeing him off, amid a good deal of noisy chaff savouring of pegs at the Yacht Club. ‘Take care, old chap,’ said one of them, a mealy-faced youth with prominent blue eyes, looking at the young widow; ‘they’re always dangerous. She’s got her eye on you already, I’ll bet.’ But she was thinking of her dead husband, with his strong hands and steady eyes, who could have taken young Jenkin-

son and shaken the soul out of him with hardly an effort.

At last all the mails had been brought on board, and the final signal was given. Colonel Jackson shook hands with his college friends, and patted Sri Kishen on the shoulder with something very like a caress; and the Bengal man kissed his wife, and unfastened the child's arms from his neck, and walked away, with his sallow bearded face working all over; and the young men went down the side into the boat, laughing and talking still; and then the screw throbbed and churned up the foam, and the ship's head was brought slowly round to the westward, and they steamed away into the sunset—homeward bound.

Guy soon settled down. He had sent off a farewell letter to Helen, protesting a little too much perhaps, and had then gone off and bought himself a very comfortable long cane chair, with a hole in the arm for a soda-water tumbler, and a place for books.

In this chair he spent a large part of his time, comfortably dressed in flannels and tennis-shoes, reading novels and poetry. It was very hot under the double awning, but the lazy unceremonious life suited him well. He was a good sailor, and, moreover, there was no rough weather. Day after day the great ship glided on over a calm blue sea without a ripple. Now and then some flying fish would rise and skim away in the sunlight, just touching the surface at intervals, their reflections moving in the water below them.

Looking over the ship's bow it seemed as if the stem were cutting through deep blue ice, the foam falling in a white heap to right and left like snow. The nights were very beautiful, soft and starlit. One or two of the larger planets made a clear separate track across the sea. The long smooth wave which went away from the ship's side was luminous with phosphorescence, and the water which was pumped out with every beat of the engines seemed full of living fire.

After five or six days' voyage, the ship stopped for a few hours at Aden, where Guy landed and posted a letter for India. Then he went on board again, and sat watching the wonderful sunset colours upon the rocks, and talking to Mrs. Stewart.

He had got to know her well by this time. She had been placed next to him at meals; and he had been touched by her sad face and gentle manner. She was a slight fair woman, and looked very pretty in her plain black dress. At first she had been rather afraid of him, but he seemed and was so unaffectedly sorry for her, and his manner was so tender and respectful, that she soon got over her shyness, and found his conversation a real help and comfort. He put her finally at her ease by telling her all about Helen, and by being good to the Bengal man's child, little May Burton, who took to him at once as children always did. The mother, poor woman, hardly left her cabin, and Mrs. Stewart had almost taken charge of May.

When they got into the Red Sea there was a smart easterly breeze, which caught the *Indus* abeam and made her roll; but it was a pleasure to watch the blue waves in the sunlight. As they struck the vessel's side and broke, the spray went high into the air, and then fell back into the dark trough below, glittering like a shower of diamonds. The easterly breeze lasted until the *Indus* entered the Gulf of Suez, when the wind went round to the north and the air grew much cooler. At Suez the passengers were to disembark for their railway journey across the desert; and here Guy and Mrs. Stewart were to say good-bye, as she was going to England by sea while Guy was going overland by Brindisi.

The night before they landed Guy was leaning against the rail after dinner, smoking a cigarette with a couple of other men, when young Jenkinson strolled up to them. He had drunk as much wine as was good for him, and was inclined to be familiar. There was something in Guy's manner, pleasant as it was, which did not encourage familiarity from a man he did not fancy, and he did not at all fancy Jenkinson, whom he had seen 'sniggering' once or twice when he had been with Mrs. Stewart. Guy had not kept away from Mrs. Stewart in consequence, but he had treated Jenkinson with very decided coldness. To-night, however, Jenkinson was emboldened by wine, and by the fact that the other two men were well known to him.

It happened that at this moment Mrs. Stewart came up from below, and stepping out on the other side of the ship, passed along the deck to her chair. They could see her plainly in the lamplight, with her black dress and graceful walk. One of the men said, 'What a pretty little woman that is.'

Jenkinson broke into a laugh. 'So Langley seems to think,' he said pointedly. His manner, and a laugh from one of the others, filled Guy with a sudden irritation.

'What do you mean?' he asked.

If there had been light enough to see his eyes, Jenkinson would have understood that he had better not go much further; but he did not see, and Guy's tone was quiet. 'Well, it seems to me you have been going it rather strong with that young woman. It's a good thing we are breaking up to-morrow, or we should have the skipper interfering. They are rather particular on board ship. No kissing allowed after lights out.'

One of the other men laughed again, in a doubtful way. Guy was boiling over with wrath, and his answer was young and violent. 'Look here, Jenkinson,' he said, with a voice which was not quite steady, 'I suppose you can't help being a cad, but you can help telling lies, and if you say another word about Mrs. Stewart, you will get the biggest hiding you ever had in your life. I daresay it won't be the first. Oh, don't begin that,' he went on, straightening himself

swiftly, as Jenkinson seemed inclined to resent the threat, 'or, by George, you shall have it now.'

It was a very unpleasant moment for all concerned, but happily Jenkinson took the insult more quietly than might have been expected, and after a few angry words he sheered off. What is a man to do when he is in the wrong and too weak to fight with any hope of success? 'Serve him right,' one of the men said. 'He ought to be well kicked;' and the other cordially agreed.

Guy walked away to the stern and lit another cigarette, and sat down on the low woodwork by the wheel. He felt rather upset by the row, now it was over. 'By Jove, I'm well out of that!' he thought. 'What an ass I was! But the little beast deserved it.' Then there came across him a doubt whether Mrs. Stewart's society had not, in fact, become a little too pleasant to him. He could not altogether deny it when he put the question to himself, but he excused himself readily. 'She's a dear little woman,' he thought, 'and I can't help being taken by her; but I have never said a word to her that I might not have said to Evie; and she's as good as gold, poor little thing.' So she was; and he had treated her with the most perfect respect; but, nevertheless, he was conscious that she had for him a certain fascination. It was, he knew, an evanescent emotion of the senses; a week hence he would have forgotten it. Nevertheless, he felt a pang at the idea of saying good-bye to her; and though he would not admit for a moment that he

loved Helen any the less truly, he recognised that he would not have liked Helen to feel towards any other man as he felt towards Mrs. Stewart. 'But women are different,' he reflected, 'and I shall never see her after to-morrow,' and he went over and sat down by her side. He could no more help loving a pretty face or a graceful manner than he could help having brown hair. His was a dangerous temperament; the chivalrous temperament that means well, and is full of good and tender feeling, overlying warm passions. A mere brute is not half so dangerous.

Next day they parted. Guy missed her badly during the three days' voyage in a fresh vessel across the Mediterranean. It was rough and cold and squally, and he had no friends, and wished himself back again on the *Indus*. She missed him too; but, as he had observed, women are different. 'How good he was to me,' she thought, 'and to May. I hope he'll be happy. I'm sure he deserves to be.'

Mrs. Stewart was no longer a living memory to Guy when he stepped out at the Wrentham station a few days later. She had taken her place, as he had known she would do, among the sweet-faced phantoms of the past. He would have said she was a dear little woman still, but he would not have walked five miles out of his way to see her.

Guy had sent a telegram in advance from Dover, and he found the dog-cart awaiting him. How extraordinary it seemed to be back again, with everything

just the same as if he had never left England. He could hardly believe that nine months had passed. There was the little quiet country station, with no passenger but himself on the platform after the train had disappeared round the corner, between the high banks. The two ruddy young porters, whose faces he knew so well, touched their caps to him as if he had been up to town for a week; and when he gave one of them his ticket and walked out through the booking-office, there were Charles and the mare standing in the evening sun, as if they had been there ever since. He could remember even the feel of the step as he got down last year; it seemed like yesterday. We get accustomed to the feeling as we grow older—get reconciled to the sense of our own nothingness; but to the young it is a source of ever-recurring wonder, almost of resentment, to find how little nature seems to care for the events of their lives.

‘Well, Charles,’ Guy said; ‘here I am again. I told you I should not be long. How are you?’

‘Very well, sir, thank you.’

‘The mare’s looking very fit. She has filled out a bit since I left.’

‘Yes, sir; she is doing nicely.’

‘Where is the luggage-cart?’

‘Just coming round the corner now, sir. The train was almost before time.’

‘All right. Then we need not bring anything with us,’ and he got up and took over the reins.

As he drove down the old road, the feeling of surprise at the want of change in everything about him haunted him still. He was almost silent as he drove along. The mare had got steadier since he left, and trotted out quietly and fast. This was a change, but it only made him notice the sameness of other things. It was early summer now instead of autumn, but he knew the very trees, and almost the very flowers by the roadside. There was the little oak in the hedge-row, with the ivy-covered stem, in which he had caught sight of a wren's nest last year as he drove past; he thought he could see the little round hole now. There was the old clump of ragged-robin in the tangle at the corner by Rudge's farm, and the yellow bird's-foot along the grassy bottom of the hedge; and there was Wrentham, dear old place. Ah! it was pleasant to be at home again.

Guy had nothing in his heart but happiness and goodwill when he jumped down from the dog-cart and walked into the hall. The doors were all open, and the summer air was playing through them. He walked on into the drawing-room, which was empty, and out upon the gravel walk at the back.

As he came out he heard Evie's voice. 'There he is. Guy! Guy!' and he looked down the sloping lawn to his left and saw them all there together—his father and mother and the two girls gathered round a little tea-table under a spreading cedar. Evie came running up the smooth grass, and he walked down to

meet her ; and then the rest of them gathered about him, and there was joy and love in every one's eyes, and all was forgotten except that he was at home again.

They sat there until near dinner-time, telling Guy all the news. Harry was away yachting. They had written to his address in town to tell him Guy was coming, but they had received no answer and did not know where he was. Ro was coming in a day or two ; he was getting on splendidly at college, and every one said he rowed so well that he was sure to be in the University boat some day. And Mr. Ridsdale, the curate, had gone over to Rome. ' By Jove ! Poor old Bar,' Guy said, and Barbara answered with a look of silent scorn. And they had had a lovely three weeks in town ; and the Academy was not worth seeing ; and so on, and so on.

And about them was the sweet English evening, and the blackbirds whistled slowly in the beech trees by the stream, and the thrushes sang their rich repeated songs, and all was soft and warm and exquisite. We know it who have had to live in exile. There is nothing on earth,—nothing—to be compared to an English spring and summer. You tire of it,—you to whom has been given the infinite blessing of spending, if you will, your lives on English soil. Some of you see more beauty in the coarse glare of an Italian sky, and bring yourselves to think, or say, that a bare sun-beaten hill, dotted with little shimmering olives, is lovelier than a

grassy English knoll shaded by great English beeches or oaks. Some of you are even so blinded by love of variety, which you call artistic feeling, as to say that the Italian and the Greek are more beautiful than the Englishwoman, whose beauty is as immeasurably above theirs as light is above darkness. May Heaven forgive you ! But it was always the same : ‘ Farewell, Monsieur Traveller : look you lisp and wear strange suits, disable all the benefits of your own country, be out of love with your nativity and almost chide God for making you that countenance you are, or I will scarce think you have swam in a gondola.’ How well he knew you three hundred years ago !

The Langleys came out again after dinner and sat listening to the birds and enjoying the long twilight ; and when the big bell rang for prayers Guy was sitting on the grass, in his old way, at his mother’s feet. For that evening, at all events, it was peace, and he would not show any sign of change. He was, indeed, very glad to find himself received as if nothing had happened. His mother would hear him lovingly, and all would go well. India seemed to have faded away. It was Maya,—a delusion and a dream ; this was the real life.

Guy went to sleep quickly that night, and Lady Mary lay awake thinking. When she got up next morning she saw her way clear before her. Partly from accident and affection for Guy, partly from calculation, she had come to the conclusion that she would say

nothing to him about Helen Treveryan. It would, she felt, be both easier and wiser to treat the affair as ended,—to assume, in spite of his warning, that his coming home meant acquiescence in her wishes, and to leave the initiative to him. There should be no recriminations on her part. She would be very loving and gentle, and would make things as pleasant as possible to him, and let home influence soak in. Everything about them would work for her and against that wretched girl. In the meantime, Guy would be constantly thrown into the society of Clara Schneider. Lady Mary's instinct was not at fault. She was a clever woman, and could make excellent strategical dispositions. Where she failed was in temper and patience. Like Lord Gough at Chillianwallah, a round shot or two dropped into her ranks invariably 'drew' her, and made her lose sight of her plans.

However, for the present, Lady Mary was manœuvring coolly and steadily, intending to work round the enemy's flank, and perhaps dislodge him altogether without firing a shot. Guy made no counter-move. He had a glimmering suspicion of her object, but he felt confident in his own position, and he shrank from an attack. His indolence and dislike of mental conflict made him do so; and his keen enjoyment of all that was pleasant and beautiful strengthened his reluctance. There was no hurry, he thought, and it was all so delightful. Instead of the howling hot wind and the sun and the dust, there was the cool green English

summer with its birds and its flowers. Everything in England was so luxurious too, so finished. From the trim hedges and fields and velvety lawns to the carefully-furnished rooms, all spoke of the loving care of successive generations. Everything in India was so rough in comparison. There Englishmen were an army in camp. No one could hope to remain in the same house more than a few years. The taste of an individual might throw a momentary charm over a barrack-like bungalow or a hastily raised flower-garden, but the next occupant might neglect the garden and furnish only one room of the house, and in a year everything would have fallen into decay, like Eastern buildings and things in general. The contrast struck Guy very strongly. He could rough it, and he could see the picturesque side of Indian life; but the comfort and luxurious beauty born of wealth and time and quietness were a real delight to him.

He spent his morning wandering over the stables and the grounds with the girls and his mother. In the afternoon they all went to the Schneiders for tennis, and the drive was beautiful; and every one was glad to see him, and Clara Schneider looked quite pretty with her heightened colour and bright eyes. When they came back they dined by the open windows; and after dinner Guy went out with his mother, and they strolled down the lawn to the stream. They stood leaning over the little wooden bridge, and chatted, and watched the water-rats playing under the

bank, until the long twilight closed in. Nothing was said by mother or son to mar the peace of a happy day.

So it went on for two or three days longer. They seemed to have completely forgotten Helen Treveryan, who was waiting alone in the pine-clad mountains, trying hard to be patient and not to doubt, but wondering sadly at times whether her lover would ever come back to her. If he did not? Well, it would be very dreadful; but so long as it was for his happiness she could bear it.

CHAPTER XXI

A DRAWN GAME

It was Roland who brought matters to a head. Roland was always putting his foot in it. He duly arrived two or three days after Guy, looking sensibly bigger about the chest and less boyish. Oxford evidently agreed with him.

That night, after the family circle broke up, the two brothers met in the smoking-room and had a quiet hour over their tobacco. Roland was going to colour a new meerschaum. He lit it carefully with a fusee, to avoid burning the edge, and held it scrupulously by the amber to avoid touching the bowl, which was just tinted with a faint primrose colour. Guy lighted a cigar, and then sat back in an easy chair, and started Roland with a question or two. The boy was always ready to talk about Oxford, and he went on merrily for some time, only interrupting himself at intervals to worship the sacred pipe. Owing to a very high meerschaum plug it only lasted a few minutes; and it could not be smoked again till it was cool, lest the colour should burn. The pleasures Roland got out of

it were the pleasures of hope rather than those of fruition. How young Roland was, Guy thought; but he could remember when he had done just the same thing. This was not improbable, as it was only three or four years before. Roland did not think himself young. On the contrary, he was a man among other men; and he was just a little inclined to look with diminished reverence upon Guy, who was supposed to have followed Harry's example and 'made an ass of himself about a woman.'

After a time, emboldened by his own conversation, and by Guy's good humour and abstention from chaff, Roland was imprudent enough to introduce that delicate subject. 'By the way, old chap,' he said, 'the mother seems quite happy again, so I suppose you have got out of that business all right?'

Guy was taken by surprise. He coloured hotly, and his face showed extreme annoyance. He objected altogether to Roland's interference in the matter; and he resented the rather patronising tone in which the question was put. 'Got out of what business?' he said.

Roland began to feel embarrassed, and laughed uneasily. 'Oh, I meant, you know, about the lovely young woman in India.'

'I don't know why you should suppose anything of the kind,' Guy said, in a rather lofty tone. 'I am not in the habit of changing my mind in those matters, and the affair is exactly where it was before.'

‘Oh, I am awfully sorry,’ Roland answered, floundering heavily; ‘I did not know it was really a serious business. I thought from the mother’s being so chirpy that it was all over. I am very sorry I said anything about it.’

For a minute Guy was silent. Roland’s words had irritated him and aroused his pride or his vanity. He felt angry with his mother for treating him like a child, and a little vexed with himself at finding that he had been so easily influenced. Then he thought of Helen, and what a shame it was on her account. Anyhow, it was impossible that he could acquiesce and drop the whole thing without a word. For the sake of his own self-respect he must make a fight of it even if he were going to give in eventually; and he was not going to give in eventually. Before he had got his thoughts quite clear he broke out into a rather vehement protest against the way in which he had been treated, and against the part which his mother expected him to play. ‘If she thinks it is all over,’ he said, ‘she is very much mistaken. I have said nothing about it, because so long as I am not attacked I don’t want to be disagreeable; but I feel exactly as I did before, and I am not going to be forced into doing what is dishonourable.’

‘Dishonourable?’ Roland answered; ‘I did not know there was anything of that sort.’

‘Well, wouldn’t it be dishonourable to give a girl up if you had proposed to her and she cared for you?’

And besides, I don't want to give her up. You don't know what she is, or you would understand.' And Guy's objection to being thought capable of having made a mistake, and his love for Helen, combined to give him an eloquence which surprised both Roland and himself. He described in glowing terms her beauty and her goodness, and the merits and services of her father, and the honour in which both of them were held. Guy spoke well when he was roused, and he spoke admirably then.

Roland, with his simple, straightforward nature, was quite carried away by his brother's warmth and chivalrous feeling. He was specially moved by Guy's description of the way in which Helen had refused to sacrifice his future, and had finally sent him to England. 'By George! that was splendid of her,' Roland said, his honest young eyes bright with enthusiasm. 'I am awfully sorry I ever thought badly of her; but I did not know all that. Mother had some story about her going on tremendously with that fellow Pitt Wright who was staying with them, and of course I thought she knew all about it.'

This was a sore point with Guy, and he lashed out savagely about Pitt Wright. When he had finished his story, Roland was quite overcome. 'What a mean brute!' he exclaimed; 'I shouldn't have thought a man could be such a cad as that. He was at Eton, too, and Oxford.' Then he went on to confess his repentance and complete conversion.

He begged Guy to speak to his mother at once. Of course she would understand, and would withdraw all her objections. No one could help seeing that Guy was perfectly right. It was only that they did not know the facts and had been told what was not true. There could not be two opinions about it. As to money, it seemed to him that Guy would have plenty; and even supposing, for the sake of argument, that everything went wrong, did Guy suppose for a moment that any of them would touch his share? Of course he was right to stick to Helen, and Roland would be proud to feel she was his sister. Guy might count upon him, whatever happened. He never suspected that even then Guy was wondering a little at the rapidity of his enthusiasm. Guy certainly seemed, and was, pleased at it; and when at last they had finished their talk, he took his brother into his own room and showed him Helen's photograph. Roland looked at it for a minute and gave it back. 'Just the sort of face I should have expected,' he said; 'I don't wonder at your sticking to her against all the world. Give her my love and tell her I long to know her.'

When Roland left the room, Guy stood looking at the photograph and thinking over the conversation. 'What a good boy Ro is,' he said to himself. 'He would back one through thick and thin.'

Next morning, before breakfast, Roland saw his mother walk out alone on to the gravel among the

flower-beds. He finished his dressing quickly and joined her. 'Good morning, mother.'

'Good morning, Ro.'

'I am glad I found you, mother; I wanted a chance of speaking to you. We've been all wrong about Guy and Miss Treveryan.'

Lady Mary looked at him with surprise and contempt. 'What do you mean?'

'Well, I have been talking to Guy, mother. She seems to have behaved awfully well, and she is awfully pretty, too, and Guy is really fond of her. I am certain he will stick to her, whatever happens.'

This was just the way to rouse Lady Mary. 'We will see about that,' she said. 'In any case, you had better let Guy speak for himself. You cannot possibly know anything about it except what he has told you, and he was not likely to think her anything but "awfully pretty."'

Ro felt rebuffed. 'All right, mother,' he answered humbly. 'Of course it is not my business. I only thought you would like to know. I am certain he did mean it.'

'I daresay. We shall see,' Lady Mary said again, and she walked in through the dining-room window. Her manner to Roland was sometimes very insolent, if such a word is applicable to a mother.

Soon afterwards the ball opened.

Guy came in to breakfast rather late, and seemed

out of spirits. He spoke little and ate little, and looked preoccupied. After breakfast he smoked a cigarette outside with Roland and the girls, but Lady Mary had hardly finished a short interview with her housekeeper before he tapped at the door of her writing-room. She knew his step, and was ready for him. 'Well,' she said, looking up with a smile, 'what do you want with me? You look as if your business was very serious.'

'So it is, mother,' he said, and he came up near her table and leant back against the chimneypiece. 'Can you spare me a few minutes?'

'Of course, dear, as many as you like. What is it?'

'I wanted to speak to you about . . . your letters.'

'Yes?'

'Well, mother, I only wanted to say that I cannot think any differently about it all. I am awfully fond of Helen, and I cannot see any reason why we should not be married.'

Lady Mary had profited by Roland's warning. She had determined to keep her temper under control, and to play the game steadily. She got up and came over to Guy's side and laid her hand on his shoulder. 'My boy,' she said, 'do you think I don't feel for you? Do you think I would say a word against this wish of yours except for your own sake?'

‘I know, mother; I am sure you don’t mean to be unkind; but really, you don’t know how things stand. You think Helen is like Harry’s wife, but she is not in the least. She is a perfect lady, and as good as she is pretty. It was she who made me come home now. She absolutely refused to marry me unless I did.’

This was not pleasant for Lady Mary to hear; and though she suppressed with an effort the look of anger which came into her face, she did not attempt to suppress the feeling at her heart. With the inconsistency engendered by a prejudice such as hers she thought it obvious that Helen’s object in urging Guy to go home, if she really had done so, was to make sure of the money. Yet she believed the girl would have jumped at Guy, money or no money. Was he not a Langley of Wrentham, and was he not Guy? However, her answer showed no trace of her annoyance. ‘I daresay, dear. She may be everything that is nice, but is not that all the more reason for you to do nothing imprudent? If anything happened to her father, would you not be very badly off with four hundred a year?’

‘Yes, I suppose we should; but I don’t believe she would mind.’

‘If she did not mind for herself, surely she would mind for your sake? If she is a good woman, and really cares for you, it would make her very unhappy to think that she had brought you to poverty. The

better she is, the more unhappy she would be. And you should think of her too.'

There was a flaw in the argument somewhere, but it had force; and Guy did not answer at once. Lady Mary saw she was making way, and she pressed her advantage. 'Remember, dear, that whenever Colonel Treveryan dies she will be left with nothing. He tells you so himself; and he cannot live for ever.'

'He might live longer than either of us.'

'No doubt he might; but it is not likely, is it?'

Guy felt he was getting the worst of the argument. 'Well, mother,' he said, 'supposing he did die, we should not starve after all. We could get along, in India, at all events.'

'Possibly; I don't know. But your regiment won't be in India more than a few years.'

'No, but I could exchange and stay out there. Some fellows do.'

Lady Mary was startled, and showed it. Guy saw the look in her eyes, and knew he had got in over her guard and touched her. 'Surely,' she said, 'you would never think of doing that?'

'Why not, mother? India is a very good place in its way; lots of sport and soldiering. For a poor man I fancy it is about the best thing to do.'

Lady Mary could only fall back on her former argument. 'I am quite sure that if Miss Treveryan is all you think her, she would be horrified at the

idea of dooming you to spend your whole life in India.'

'I don't know, mother. Her father has done it, and she is quite ready to do it herself.'

'That's a different thing altogether.'

'I don't see how.'

Lady Mary was beginning to lose patience. 'My dear boy,' she said, 'if you can't see it, I can,—very clearly. They are Indian people, and naturally like the country. To you it would be exile for life.'

'They are no more Indian than I am, mother. It is just as much exile to them as it would be to me. Colonel Treveryan went out in the service just as I have done.'

This was getting intolerable. 'It is no use arguing, Guy,' she said. 'I am sure your father would never consent to go on giving you your allowance in order to help you to banish yourself for life.'

Lady Mary's tone roused Guy. He did not like being threatened. 'Very well, mother. It is no use my saying any more. I daresay we could get on in India with two hundred a year, and besides Colonel Treveryan won't die yet.'

There the matter ended for the time. A few more words were spoken, and then a servant knocked at the door, and Guy took the opportunity to leave the room. Lady Mary had held her ground and repulsed the attack; but Guy felt that the idea of his staying in India had shaken her. On the whole, the fight had

been pretty even. Both the combatants drew off with a feeling that for the present they had had enough of it, and with a disinclination to come to close quarters again unless obliged. As they cooled down, this disinclination grew stronger. Guy was glad enough to delude himself with the idea that what he had said would gradually come home to his mother's mind. He wanted to enjoy in peace all the pleasant things around him. He was even a little inclined to resent Roland's enthusiasm in the cause; and the boy returned to college a day or two later puzzled and somewhat discomfited by his brother's change of manner. Lady Mary, on her side, after much serious thought, resolved to adhere to her original plan. She was more impatient than Guy, and found it harder not to force another fight; but as she saw how thoroughly he was enjoying himself, her mind was quieted. His resolution would melt away gradually under the influence of his surroundings.

Guy was, in fact, curiously content. He never seemed bored by the slowness of the life. Once he went up to town to see his tailor and so on, but to her surprise he came back two days later in the best of spirits, and appeared to be perfectly happy, reading, and wandering about the grounds and stables, and going out for rides with his father and the girls, or driving with her. Even a few weeks of hot weather in India had made him appreciate in some measure the pleasures of an English summer. He was always

contrasting the two, much to Lady Mary's satisfaction. Once or twice he played cricket, and made some runs, which pleased him ; and they had some tennis-parties, when he managed everything admirably, and was most cheery and useful. All this time the sore subject was avoided as completely as if Helen Treveryan had never troubled their peace of mind. Now and then each knew that the other was thinking about her, but nothing was said. As to the girls, they really came to forget that such a person existed ; and Charles Langley was glad to leave the matter to his wife. It was characteristic both of him and of Guy that Helen's name was never even mentioned between them.

Meanwhile Lady Mary hoped, and was inclined to believe, that the constant presence of Clara Schneider was beginning to have its effect. Oddly enough, she had found Mrs. Schneider quite ready to fall in with her views on this subject. Clara, with her quarter of a million, might have looked higher, and her mother knew it well enough ; but though the old lady was a parvenu and a snob, she had a warm heart. She wept bitter tears in secret when Clara gently but decidedly refused young Lord Faughaballagh, with his impudent handsome face and his Irish peerage ; but when she realised that her daughter really loved Guy Langley she never attempted to force her inclinations. They gave one or two smart parties in their big house in London, and then they came quietly down to Warwickshire. Clara was told plainly enough what the

reason was ; but Clara had not much pride, and she was in love.

Guy seemed quite prepared to play into their hands. Clara and he had always been good friends, and a man likes to be appreciated. Moreover, in the short time since he had left England Clara had improved. She had fined down a good deal and got more expression, and she was beautifully dressed. Her manner had always been gentle and pleasant ; it was gentle and pleasant still, very pleasant. There was nothing effusive about her, but she evidently liked and admired Guy, and she let him see it. When he came near her her face lighted up, and the colour came into it. Sometimes, when her eyes were bright and her manner animated, she looked really pretty. By the side of Helen Treveryan she would not have been noticed, but she was by no means a disagreeable companion when Helen was not to be had.

There could, in fact, be no doubt about it that Guy flirted with her shamefully. He did not go much out of his way to seek her, but there was no necessity for that. In one way or another they were constantly thrown together. Every one combined with this object, and as Clara was on intimate terms with Barbara and Evelyn, the matter was easy enough. Guy did it with his eyes open too. He knew perfectly well now what his mother wanted, and he felt pretty sure of Clara's feelings. Yet he did not avoid her, either for Helen's sake, or for the sake of Clara herself. He could not

seem cold to a woman if she liked him. It was painful to him to inflict the momentary humiliation, even though it might be a duty to do so, and a kindness in the end.

He persuaded himself that he meant no treason to Helen; on the contrary, he wrote and told her he was flirting desperately right and left, which hurt her though he laughed about it, and gave her to understand that he was doing so in order to carry out her wishes to the utmost, and to convince his mother the more decisively in the end. 'But, my own darling,' he wrote, 'it is hard work sometimes when the thought of your face comes before me. I have to force it away before I can be decently civil to any one else. And it is always coming, night and day, wherever I am. Sometimes I am sure I must say the most extraordinary things, for I wake up to find myself talking fluently, when I have been thinking of nothing but you and longing to be with you. Oh, when will they understand! It seems as if the term of probation you inflicted upon me would never end.'

Certainly Guy did not take the obvious means of making them understand. He occasionally spoke to his sisters about Clara in a way which was intended to show them that he did not care for her; but he behaved very much as if he did, and the girls hoped for the best; so did Lady Mary, who never dreamt that she was tempting her son to do a dishonourable thing, or reproached herself or him in any way. The

more he committed himself, the better she was pleased. What did anything else matter so long as Guy got the money? He might not be really in love with Clara; he might even be in love with another woman, but those were trifles. And the other woman? Well, that was her own affair. She was an Indian pirate, who deserved no quarter or pity.

At last, about a week before Guy's leave was up, Lady Mary could control herself no longer. They had all been over to the Schneiders to lunch, and had spent an idle afternoon wandering about the grounds, and seeing some improvements which were being effected. Guy had been interested in it all, and in Clara's conversation. He liked her simple way with her people, —the gardeners and the workmen; and he had been rather impressed with her capacity and taste. She was very happy in his company, and was looking her best.

Lady Mary had driven Guy over in her pony-carriage, his father and the girls riding. When they got into the pony-carriage again, Guy was very cheerful and talkative. He was telling his mother about some of the new shrubberies and walks that Clara had designed, and what his advice had been. 'Of course it is not like coming in for an old place,' he said; 'but still it must be very jolly to have a free hand and lots of money, and be able to do just what you please. One could make it wonderfully pretty. She will, too,

I expect, if the old lady lets her alone. She has uncommonly good taste, and is much cleverer than one gives her credit for being. It is her nervous manner, I suppose.'

'Yes. She does not do herself justice. She is too diffident. But she is a dear girl, and has a great deal of character.'

'I daresay she has. It's a nice manner, too. She talks like a lady, and has none of her mother's vulgarity.'

'My dear boy, there is no vulgarity about Mrs. Schneider. She comes of a very good family indeed. I think she is charming,—so warm-hearted and honest.'

'Yes, I daresay, mother, but you know what I mean. She need not trot out the whole peerage whenever she meets you. Clara's a cut above her somehow.'

'Well, Clara certainly has very nice ways; and she is as good as she seems. He will be a lucky man who gets her. It is not often one sees a girl with that money so thoroughly unspoilt.'

'No, I suppose not.'

There was a moment's silence, and then Lady Mary gave way to the temptation. 'Why don't you try to get her, Guy? I think I know what her answer would be if you asked her.'

'I, mother? You forget.'

'What do you mean? Surely you are not still worrying yourself about that old affair?'

‘I am not worrying myself, mother, but of course I am not free.’

Lady Mary caught at the word. ‘Not free? Why not? You are not bound. You told me so yourself.’

‘No, I am not exactly bound, but . . .’

‘Then no one could blame you.’

‘I don’t suppose any one would blame me, mother. I was not thinking of that.’

At the same time he remembered that he had been blamed already. He allowed himself to be diverted into that train of thought, and it annoyed him. ‘All the same,’ he added, ‘I think Colonel Treveryan did blame me before.’

‘What for?’

‘Well, for proposing before I knew I could afford to marry. He was not very pleasant about it.’

‘Mercenary wretch,’ Lady Mary thought, but she did not say so. Indeed, she did not quite know what to say. She could not say Guy had been blameless in proposing without consulting her; yet she resented his being blamed by others. ‘That is all the more reason,’ she said. ‘If he did that, he certainly could not blame you now for not proposing when you know you can’t afford it.’

Then Guy got on the right line again. He said it was after all not a question of blame. He was fond of Helen, and had asked her to be his wife, and he could not marry any one else. But he spoke without fire, and Lady Mary pressed him to promise that

he would think it over. He resisted, but eventually, in his indolent dilatory way, he closed the discussion by giving the required promise. He was not inclined to go on fighting that day ; it was a nuisance. ‘Very well, mother,’ he said. ‘It’s not the slightest use ; but I will think it over if you wish it.’

‘That is a dear boy,’ she answered ; and already she felt that success was within her grasp. He was beginning to give way ; this was merely a demonstration to cover his retreat. For the rest of the drive she spoke of other matters, and was very affectionate. Helen’s name was not again brought forward.

The remaining week passed rapidly away, and Guy had only one more day at home, but still he had made no sign. Lady Mary was getting impatient. Nevertheless she was hopeful enough. Since their conversation Guy had twice met the Schneiders, and had been very attentive to Clara, who looked happy. To-day would probably settle the question, if it were not settled already. The Schneiders were coming over to lunch, and he would have another chance.

Everything fell out as Lady Mary intended. Her husband was away at a Conservative meeting, which bored him greatly. The day was fine, and after lunch they all strolled out upon the lawn. The ladies, old and young, were disposed to favour any arrangement which would leave Guy and Clara alone ; and as Guy had no objection, though he perfectly understood his mother’s manœuvres, the two soon found themselves

on the sloping grass near the stream, out of sight of every one.

It was a perfect summer afternoon in the end of July. The air was still and balmy, and the sun bright. The stream murmured softly between its grassy banks, making sweet music with the enamelled stones. Close by, in a little nook among the trees, was a seat where Guy used often to come and sit, reading and smoking. He knew very well that he had no business to be behaving as he was. He even recognised the fact that it was rather a dangerous game. But Clara was looking bright and pretty in her perfectly-fitting dress; and he was young and hot of blood, and the day was made for love. His voice and his eyes had a significant softness in them as he spoke to her. 'Let's sit here a little. It is such a delicious day, and you must be tired of walking.'

Clara sat down willingly enough. She was not tired: she thought she could have walked by his side for ever; but this was better still. Surely it was coming now, what she had longed for. He had been so tender and good to her lately, as if he cared for her. Her heart was beating wildly, and her hands were trembling. Poor little woman! He did not realise to the full what it was to her, and besides, he did not mean to go much further; but one cannot always stop just where one likes.

'Ah!' he said with a sigh as he sat down, 'this is perfect.' There was a moment's silence, and then he

went on calmly : 'How delicious the sound of running water is.'

She did not answer, and he sat looking out before him, and slowly repeated a verse of Lermontoff's :

'When dark and cool within the hollow places,
Among the worn wet stones the waters murmur low,
And through their dreamy song my fancy traces
Some strange old saga borne from lands left long ago.'

Then he roused himself and laughed. 'Only the stream comes straight from the dam up there, and I don't suppose it is five miles long, all told. What an absurd little country England is. There are a lot of pike in the lake above the dam, and there are some trout in the stream. When I was a bad little boy I used sometimes to shoot them under the bank. Even if you miss them they get stunned or something, and float up as often as not.'

Clara said 'Really?' but she did not seem interested. Her heart was beating more steadily now, but her relief was mingled with disappointment. She was not inclined to talk about fishes. The next moment Guy set her off again. 'Oh dear,' he said; 'it is very dreadful to think that I have to leave the old place to-morrow.' He looked at her, and she flushed a little, but she said nothing. 'Don't you think it's very hard lines, Miss Schneider?'

'Yes, very.'

'Aren't you sorry for me?'

She was pained by his tone, which was only half serious. 'I don't think you are very sorry yourself, really.'

'Oh, what a shame!' he said, looking up in her face and making her colour again. 'Do you think it is pleasant leaving all my people, and—and you?'

'I don't know,' she answered rather feebly; 'I suppose not.'

She was looking pretty now, with her eyes down and the blood bright in her cheek and neck. Even then Guy noticed with disapproval the short colourless lashes, but he could not resist going on. 'You know it is not,' he said; 'and I think you are sorry for me.' She did not answer. 'Are you a little bit sorry on your own account? Shall you miss me just a little at first?'

It was a cruel shame, and he felt it directly he had spoken. Clara's face was very pathetic as she raised it. Her eyes were full, and her lips were trembling, but she tried to smile. 'Perhaps, a little, just at first,' she said, and dropped her eyes again.

Then Guy did what a good many men would have done who had got so far. 'Dear little woman,' he said, and drew her to him, and kissed her. And she hid her face on his shoulder and let his lips wander at will.

Before another word had been spoken, Guy and Clara were startled by the sound of voices, and through

their leafy screen they saw Lady Mary and Mrs. Schneider strolling towards them along the path. The two ladies desired nothing less than to interrupt such an interview. They would have been only too delighted to know it was going on, and would have avoided the place as if it had been a dissenting chapel. But Fate was too strong for them, and as they approached the seat Guy and Clara got up and spoke. Lady Mary's first feeling was one of intense vexation; then after a searching glance at the young people her vexation gave way to a confident hope. Guy was steady enough. It was not the first time he had kissed a pretty girl; and if you had given him the chance he would probably have told you he sincerely hoped it might not be the last. But Clara was blushing crimson, and in spite of her embarrassment there was in her eyes a radiant joy which was new to them. Both the mothers understood, or thought they understood; they would have left the young people again, but Guy began talking volubly to Mrs. Schneider, and Lady Mary and Clara walked after them. Lady Mary let them get some paces ahead, and then she laid her hand on Clara's arm, and said with a smile, 'You look very guilty to-day; what have you been doing?' Clara blushed again; then she took in her own the hand that was touching her.

'I am very happy,' she said, looking at Lady Mary.

'I am so glad, so very glad. Guy has spoken to you?'

Clara hesitated. 'I think he cares for me,' she said at last; 'but, please, don't ask me any more just now. I ought not to say anything.'

Lady Mary looked a little disappointed, but she only said, 'Very well, dear,' and they began to talk of other things.

The Schneiders went away soon afterwards, and the parting between Guy and Clara was ordinary and formal. He might have secured another opportunity, but he did not accept his chance. She did not quite understand; but she thought he would come or write to her, and she shook hands with him cheerfully. And he held her hand for a second and looked in her eyes, and said, 'Good-bye. *Auf wiedersehen.*'

Guy knew he was 'in for it' when his mother asked him to come into the garden after their departure. Directly they were alone, she turned upon him with an inquiring face. 'Well, Guy?'

'What, mother?'

'Have you nothing to tell me?'

Guy looked uncomfortable. 'Not much,' he said.

She waited a little in hopes that he would say more, and then went on: 'My boy, you know how anxious I am about you. I was in hopes that something had happened to-day which would have made me very happy.'

Guy was looking away and digging holes in the grass with his stick.

‘Didn’t you speak to Clara?’ Lady Mary said at last, desperately.

‘Do you mean, propose to her?’

‘Yes.’

‘No, mother. I didn’t propose to her.’

‘Surely, Guy, you said something that made her think you cared for her? I am sure she did think so.’

Guy felt annoyed with poor Clara, but on reflection he had honesty enough to admit that the fault was his. ‘Well, mother,’ he said at last, ‘I am afraid I have made an awful mess of it. I expect I have let her think something of the kind.’

‘Oh! I am so glad. I cannot tell you how glad I am. God bless you, my boy.’

‘But, mother, you forget.’

‘No, Guy, I forget nothing; but I am certain this is for your real happiness; and I know that now your honour is concerned you will never hesitate again.’

Guy winced. ‘My honour, mother? If that is concerned at all, it is the other way.’

‘No, it is not. Miss Treveryan deliberately set you free, and you are in no way bound to her. You are bound to Clara if you have let her believe you cared for her.’

Guy was not deceived; but it was not easy to answer at once. He was beginning to realise that there are some situations from which one can only escape *relictâ non bene parmula*, leaving one’s honour

behind. For the moment Guy was rescued from further trouble by the arrival of his father, who appeared out of the drawing-room window.

The evening that followed was not so sad as the one which preceded Guy's first departure for India. They had all got accustomed to the idea now, and they had seen Guy come back in a few months. Moreover, they were deeply interested and excited about the game that was being played. It was different altogether.

At bedtime Lady Mary asked Guy to come to her after his cigar; and when she had him alone she pressed him very hard. She felt that the decisive moment had arrived, and she attacked with fiery impetuosity from the position she had manœuvred to attain. She tried entreaties and appeals to his love for her, then appeals to his honour, and anger and threats, doing her utmost to force him to clinch matters there and then by writing to Clara Schneider. 'If you do not,' she said, 'I can never look them in the face again. It will be an intolerable disgrace. I shall feel that we have betrayed our best friends, and in our own house.'

She seemed on the point of succeeding, but still Guy would not quite surrender. Now and then he gave ground, but with the lazy tenacity which characterised him he still refused to write. He would not be rushed; his very indolence helped him. Putting all else aside, he really could not sit down at

that time of night, when he wanted to go to bed, and write a proposal. Moreover, he was not going to be overlooked like a child; it was too much altogether.

At last Lady Mary was forced to give up in despair. Nevertheless, Guy had suffered in the conflict. His mother had brought him to admit that Helen had left him perfectly free, and that he had committed himself with Clara, and that he would be behaving badly to her if he did not come forward now. He had also been brought to see the pleasantness of becoming master of Clara's wealth. Though he did not surrender he was badly shaken, and his last words to his mother were full of doubt. 'I will try to see it, mother, but don't press me any more just now. I really feel completely stumped about it all; and anyhow,' he added, with a rather hard laugh, '“it's as well to be off with the old love before you're on with the new.”' He certainly had a 'damnable iteration.'

Once away from his mother, he put off the question till the morrow and went to sleep. He had still a day in London, and need not decide till then.

The next morning Guy went off. His mother was engrossed by her plan, and she could speak of nothing else. Her last words were: 'Do be a dear boy, and make my heart happy by writing before you leave England, and then come back directly you can get leave and be married.'

'I will see, mother,' was all he could answer, and

he kissed her and begged her not to worry about it, and was gone.

That morning after breakfast Lady Mary discussed the whole question with her husband; she spoke very confidently. Though she could not assert that her success had been complete, she felt and insisted that it had been very considerable. The question was no longer whether they would help him to marry Helen Treveryan. Guy, she said, had practically made no attempt to shake the resolution she had intimated to him. He was now convinced that they would never agree to that marriage, and he had evidently recognised the imprudence of it. Finally, he was committed by his behaviour to Clara Schneider. All would go well. To clinch matters, Lady Mary now wanted her husband to write to Colonel Treveryan and tell him definitely that the thing could not be.

Charles Langley listened with a growing sense of doubt. Being a man, he understood the danger of letting Guy return to the presence of Helen Treveryan; and being a gentleman, he felt uncomfortable at the whole thing. Lady Mary bore him down as usual. She admitted that it would have been better not to let Guy see Helen again; but she argued that Guy had never really cared very much about the girl, and that he had resisted only for form's sake. He was ready to give way now, and they had only to be firm. Besides, they could not desert the Schneiders and let Guy behave badly to them. There was only one

thing to be done. They must screw their courage to the sticking-place, and then they would not fail. Lady Mary always found it difficult to recognise the possibility of defeat. She was determined to get her own way, and hitherto she had almost invariably got her own way. She was blinded in this case by her strong will and strong feelings ; but it must be confessed that she had some cause for self-deceit. And, blinded or not, what more could she do ?

The letter to Colonel Treveryan was not nicely or prudently worded. It was curt, and it was written *de haut en bas*, which was a mistake.

SIR—I understand that before leaving India my son informed you of my inability to approve or sanction his projected marriage. Since he has been in England, my objections have been fully explained to him, and I write to let you know that he now recognises the force of those objections, and views the matter in an altogether different light. I trust, therefore, that you will acquiesce in the termination of an affair which could only result in disappointment and unhappiness to all concerned. —I remain, sir, yours faithfully,

CHARLES LANGLEY.

Colonel Treveryan,

&c.

&c.

Charles Langley showed considerable reluctance to copy out and sign this letter. Men have more sense of fair play than women, and in some ways more gentlemanly feeling, so to speak. ‘I cannot see why on earth I should write at all,’ he said. ‘He did not write to me, and Guy surely ought to manage the business himself.’

‘Yes, but it will strengthen his hands very much if you write, and save him a great deal of trouble.’

‘I don’t like it. He’s in the service, or was, and they seem very decent sort of people. It isn’t a pleasant thing to do.’

‘Perhaps not, but one can’t expect to do nothing but what is pleasant, and they have brought it upon themselves.’

‘Well, I suppose you know best, but I wish I need not be dragged into these matters.’ Then he wrote the letter and signed it, and gave it to her. ‘I hope we are not making Guy behave badly,’ Charles Langley said, with a last faint protest, and she answered: ‘I should have thought you could safely leave that to me.’ He said no more, and the letter was duly despatched.

Then Lady Mary felt that she had done her duty; she could only leave the rest in God’s hands and await the issue. Before sleeping that night she thanked Him for having helped her to make her son unfaithful, and she prayed very earnestly that He would be pleased to drive out from his heart the love of a true, unselfish woman, and to fill it with the love of money. Lady Mary did not know Helen Treveryan, but she had Mrs. Aylmer’s letter, and if she had chosen to think and inquire she might have learnt more. She did not want to learn more.

CHAPTER XXII

BACK AT SYNTIA

GUY had made up his mind on one point when he reached Paddington. He certainly would not propose to Clara Schneider before leaving England, whatever he might do later. It was a bright summer morning, and he found it hard to keep his thoughts steadily to the subject as he looked out upon the beautiful country through which the train passed. How different, he thought, from the brown Indian plains; and how he wished he were going to stay for the partridge-shooting. He wandered off from this to other matters, and his efforts to get back to Clara Schneider worried him. After all, there was lots of time. He could think it all over thoroughly in that horrible railway journey to Brindisi.

He had a busy day in London, and when he stepped into the train for Dover he had not sent to his mother the news she was longing to receive. He disappeared like some deity of old behind a golden cloud.

DEAREST MOTHER—I have had a very tiring day and am dead-beat, so I cannot write much. Good-bye. I hope I shall

not be long away this time. I will write to you from Brindisi.
—Ever your affectionate son,
GUY LANGLEY.

The express went rushing down through the lovely Kentish country, and then there was the ever-rough passage to Calais; and then the India mail steamed away across France, with its eternal lines of poplar trees like the valleys of Kabul, and through the Mont Cenis tunnel, and down among the vines and olives of Italy, until at last, close by on the left, Guy saw again the blue Adriatic, with a red-sailed fishing-boat nearing the shore. He had had plenty of time on that comfortless, wearisome journey to think out his thoughts; and his thoughts had not been altogether pleasant. What was the net result of his voyage home? So far as Helen was concerned it was a defeat, or at best a drawn game. No definite conclusion had been reached, and he had certainly gained nothing. His mother had stood to her guns, and he if anything had rather gone back. Then he had committed himself most infernally with Clara Schneider. He had deliberately allowed his mother to draw him into that trap with his eyes open, and now she had completely turned the tables on him. When he came home the question had been whether he could persuade Lady Mary to approve his marriage with Helen; now the question was whether he was to accept her view and marry Clara. There was a great deal of truth too in what she had said. If he married Helen they would be badly off. Was it right to Helen herself?

And yet, they would not be so very poor after all if his people came round. He could not give Helen up. How pretty and good and graceful she was! The idea of having her in his arms again came to him with a sudden thrill of delight. And Clara? Well, Clara was a good little woman too, and he liked her, but he certainly was not the least in love with her. Even if Helen were not concerned, it would be an awful nuisance to be tied to a woman he did not care about. The money would be very jolly, no doubt, and it would make the old mother awfully happy. What a stableful of hunters he could keep, and everything else of the best! But it would all be hers, and he should not like feeling he was living on his wife. What was the use of thinking of that? He was not going to sell himself for any money in the world; he had always scoffed at such an idea. His mother said his honour was involved, but he had said nothing to Clara really. As to her caring for him, if she really did, he was sorry; but it was not just his kissing her that had done it. Anyhow, she would probably get over it soon enough, and marry some one with a title, which would be much better for her and would delight that dear old snob of a mother of hers. Perhaps he ought to write, but what could he write? The best thing would be to treat the whole thing as if it had been a mere flirtation and say nothing. After all, he had only kissed her. She was not the first, and the others did not suppose he meant anything serious.

‘ L’amour fait passer le temps,
Et le temps fait passer l’amour.’

If anything happened to prevent his marrying Helen, then it might be possible, but not now. And so on, and so on, round and round in circles, with only the negative result that he would write nothing, for the present at all events. There was lots of time to think on the sea-voyage.

From Brindisi, therefore, he merely wrote a little ordinary note to his mother, telling her about the journey, and saying nothing about Clara. And poor Clara waited and wondered and wept, and tried to think it would all come right somehow, just as if she had been a little village maiden without a shilling in the world.

The sea-voyage was detestable. It was very rough monsoon weather; the few ladies were sick, the ship was wet and cheerless, and Guy longed for Bombay. There was no Mrs. Stewart on board, and nothing to do but read in a rolling saloon. He was not seasick, but it depressed him and made him bilious and miserable. Now and then the thought of Helen came across him, and his heart thrilled again; but he should not see her for weeks, and besides . . . Was he making a mad mistake and ruining both their lives?

The voyage did come to an end at last, and then followed the railway journey to Syntia. Guy found a great change since he had travelled down. Everything was green and rank. Water lay about him in

all directions. Where the railway had passed over great empty river-beds of yellow sand there were now mud-coloured torrents, hundreds of yards in width, swirling down between steep banks. There were flooded pools along the embankment, where the earth had been dug out, and the black and white kingfishers hung quivering over them, or folded their wings and dropped like a stone with hardly a splash. Guy wondered where the fish came from. The sky was full of dark clouds. It was hot, a heavy sultry heat, but nothing to what it had been in May.

On the day that he neared Syntia, Guy lay at full length on the carriage seat, smoking, reading, thinking, and watching the beautiful alternations of rain and cloud and sunshine on the broad green plains. They were carefully cultivated here, and dotted with fine clumps of palms and mango trees. In the distance the fields and the trees formed glades which looked almost like pieces of an oak-timbered English park. Even now he did not know exactly what he meant to do. He loved Helen as much as ever, he thought, and did not mean to give her up, but it was very puzzling. Even now, with the afternoon sun upon the fields and Syntia within an hour of him, he had not clearly mapped out his line of action. Helen would be away still, and he would talk to Mrs. Aylmer. Practically, this was a decision, as he would have known if he had chosen to think it out; but it was an unconscious decision, and gave him no trouble. He sighed and

leant back against his pile of rugs, and went on with his book,—a novel of Ouida's. He used to laugh at Ouida's heroes and their impossible deeds, and to criticise her work as reckless and unfinished; but, nevertheless, he felt that she had a touch about her somehow. He looked up with moist eyes from a page of *Tricotrin* as the train rumbled on to the Loonee bridge. Ten minutes more and he would be in Syntia.

Through the iron side of the bridge Guy gazed at the rushing river below and the native houses on the shore, and then the deafening rattle ceased, and the train ran on to solid ground again, and he lay waiting for the scenery which had become so familiar.

There it was,—the great open racecourse, with its clumps of palms, looking greener than he had ever seen it, but otherwise just the same. How well he remembered some of his canters there with Helen. Once in particular, when they came round the corner into the straight, parallel to the railway line, and his big new 'Waler' plunged and kicked and set off Sultan; he could see it now. It was just opposite there, not a hundred yards from his carriage window. He could see the little Arab throw up his head with a snort and a sudden bound, and then go off as if the devil were at his heels. How well she sat him! The first jump somehow loosened her hair, and her whip-hand went up to it, but it came pouring out in a bright brown shower. Then, as he wrenched at his Waler's stupid

head, he saw her sailing away in front of him, her hands down, and her slight figure as erect as ever, till Sultan's impetuous rush gradually slackened into a steady gallop, and she pulled him up. How beautiful she looked when Guy rode up to her full of apologies, the brown hair down below her waist, and her face flushed with exercise and confusion. She blamed herself for her carelessness; and he dismounted and held Sultan's rein as she hastily coiled her hair up in a massive knot, and fastened it with the one or two hair-pins that were left to her.

Guy was still picturing the scene to himself, and his heart was full of Helen's beauty when the train ran into the station, and standing on the platform, within a few feet of the carriage, was Helen herself! She was speaking to a servant and did not see him, though he was so close to her. After the first instant of surprise, he noticed that she looked thin and white, and his heart grew big with pity and shame. As he got up from his seat she raised her eyes and saw him. He sprang down from the step on to the stone flags, and all was over. He could not have looked in her face, as she stood there all unprepared, and have shown her any sign of change. It would have been like striking her a sudden blow; and he could not have endured the pain in her eyes. Moreover, he felt not the slightest desire to show any change. He saw her flush up with a sudden delight which, in her surprise, she made no attempt to conceal, and he stepped forward eagerly and

held out his hand. What did he care for all the world with the thrill of her presence running through him ?

‘ You have not changed ? ’ he said quickly, holding the little gauntleted hand, and thrusting aside all else but the feeling of the moment. And she, knowing he loved her still, and half-dazed with the suddenness of her joy, looked up at him with beautiful radiant eyes and smiled at the question.

‘ I ? Never ! You know that. ’

It passed in a second, and then they stood talking quietly in their empty corner of the station until Colonel Treveryan came up. He looked surprised to see Guy, and troubled, but he shook hands and asked him how he was.

‘ Very well, thank you, sir, and delighted to get back. ’

‘ I didn’t think you could be in till to-morrow at the earliest. ’

‘ We were a day earlier than we expected, and I just managed to catch the mail train. ’

The fact was, that Colonel Treveryan was taking Helen away on purpose that she might not be in Syntia when Guy arrived. There had been no letter from him announcing that all was settled at home, and, failing that, Colonel Treveryan did not want them to meet until he had seen Guy himself. Helen had come down from Mussooree a fortnight before, as Mrs. Aylmer had gone up to Mabel, and though she had said little, Colonel Treveryan could see that she was not

happy. It had now been arranged that she should go away to some friends for a day or two. This was in all respects a convenient arrangement, as it happened that Colonel Treveryan wished to go out shooting. For some weeks past a village a few miles down the line had been disturbed by a tiger, which had killed a number of cattle and eventually a woman. The jungle was thick and difficult, but there had been a longish break in the rains in this part of the country, and it was reported to Colonel Treveryan, who knew the ground well, that the animal had taken up his quarters in a small piece of jungle where he might be got at even now. It was worth trying, at all events, as the people were much alarmed, and the postal runners could hardly be induced to go through. Young Goldney, when he heard of it, was very keen to see whether the beast could not be killed; and it was settled that they should send out a couple of tents and make the attempt. They had chosen this day for a start, because Guy had written to Chimp that he intended to stay a day in Bombay and try and pick up a horse. He could not, therefore, be in until the next day or probably the day after.

The whole party got into the carriage together, the poor little Pink 'un much taken aback when he saw Guy, but polite and pleasant as ever. They had only a few minutes together before reaching the cantonment station, but during that time Guy asked for and obtained Colonel Treveryan's consent to join the party.

‘How I wish I could come with you,’ he said wistfully.

Colonel Treveryan reflected. There was room and food in camp. Why not let the boy come, and hear what he had to say? Helen was doubtless anxious, and apparently things had turned out all right. ‘Would you really like it?’ he said. ‘It will be very uncomfortable, and we shall probably get nothing.’

‘I don’t care about that, sir. I was in hopes of coming over to you to-morrow and having a talk, and it is very disappointing to find you going off.’

Helen could not hear. She was sitting on the opposite side of the carriage in her light gray silk travelling-dress, talking to Goldney, and looking very happy.

‘Very well; come along then,’ Colonel Treveryan said, and he turned to Helen: ‘Langley is coming to take care of us.’

Helen understood, and looked a little embarrassed.

Goldney’s pleasure was quite spoilt. He smiled a sickly smile, and tried to seem, and be, pleased at the news, but he could not like being with Guy. However humble and hopeless a man’s love may be, it is hard for him to like the favoured rival.

‘What guns have you got?’ Colonel Treveryan said.

‘A .450 express and a ten-bore rifle. Will that do?’

‘Yes; but it is likely to be snap-shooting if we see

the beast. If you don't mind firing ball out of your shot-gun, and have got any cartridges, I think I would bring that instead of the express. Probably you will find it handier at close quarters, and it hits very hard.'

'All right, sir. I only hope we may get a chance.'

'I do hope you will all be careful,' Helen said.

Colonel Treveryan laughed, and Guy looked at her lovingly; then the whistle sounded, and the train ran into the cantonment station.

Guy said good-bye to Colonel Treveryan, with a promise that he would come on by the next train, which left Syntia about half-past ten at night. Helen shook hands with him from the window with a grave look in her face. Her happiness had been suddenly dashed by a presentiment of evil. 'You will be careful?' she said hastily in a low tone, and he smiled up at her troubled eyes and nodded.

He waited till the train left the station, and then gathered up his things and got into a carriage. As he drove off, he was whistling the *Lorelei*. Fate had decided for him, and relieved him of all further bother. Now that he had no longer before him the trouble of making up his mind he was perfectly happy. What were Clara and her money to him? He thought of Helen, and wondered how he ever could have hesitated. 'I never did really hesitate,' he said to himself, and believed it. In a sense he was right. Unknown to himself, almost in spite of himself, his heart had remained true to his love. His hesitation had been

real enough, but it had been superficial. Until he returned to Helen he had not seen to the bottom of his nature. There are things in us that surprise us at times, both good and evil. The eye of the mind cannot search the depths of the heart, even when the heart is at rest ; and when the slightest breeze comes to ruffle the surface, everything is hidden for the time.

CHAPTER XXIII

CAMP

GUY reached his quarters about six o'clock and found them empty. Chimp did not expect him till next day, and had gone out to tennis,—*kirikit*, as Guy's native servant called it. That invaluable person took charge of Guy's boxes and keys, and soon had everything in its place. Guy meanwhile walked over to the Aylmers to get his leave, which, indeed, was hardly necessary as two or three days of his three months still remained unspent.

Mrs. Aylmer was away in Mussooree, but the Colonel was in his room. He had returned from a ride, and was smoking a cigar before dinner, which his wife would never have allowed him to do. He received Guy cordially, and made no objection to the leave. He liked his boys to be sportsmen. 'Only take care, Langley,' he said; 'a cat as big as a bullock is a nasty thing to deal with. However, Treveryan knows the game. Will you have a cigarette?'

'Thank you, sir, I think I will go back and see about my guns and clothes. I haven't unpacked yet.'

‘Very well. We shall meet at mess.’ Then, as Guy was going out, the Colonel put his hand on his shoulder. ‘All settled satisfactorily, I hope?’

Guy hesitated. ‘I hope so, sir. I think it will be all right.’

‘I am glad to hear it. Well, good-bye for the present.’

Guy went out, and Colonel Aylmer sat down again. ‘That doesn’t sound very promising,’ he thought; ‘I wonder what will be the end of it.’

Guy found his clothes laid out ready for him, his mess-dress on the bed, and his shooting-kit and open gun-cases on the matted floor. The bearer was an old regimental hand, and understood young men and their ways.

Guy took out his barrels and looked through them against the light. Chimp had not forgotten his promise to take care of them during the rains, and they were all as clean and bright as the day Guy bought them. The locks and breech had been carefully cleaned too, and everything worked quite smoothly. He put together his shot-gun and his heavy rifle, and then took them to pieces again and put them back in their cases. A minute’s examination showed him that everything else was ready, down to the large cross-handled hunting-knife in its leather sheath, which was to be worn for the first time in case of accidents. He had still a half-hour before he need dress for dinner, and it struck him that he would spend a few minutes in writing a line to

Roland, who would be at home by this time. He sat down with a cigarette and wrote.

DEAR RO—I got back here all right an hour ago, and had the luck to meet the Treverys at the railway station. They were just going away. Helen looked sweeter than ever, and if ever I could have thought of giving her up, the sight of her would have been enough to drive such an idea out of my head once and for all. She is a little white and thin, poor darling, but I am conceited enough to hope that I shall be able to bring the old colour back before long. She was very pleased to see me, I think, and to know I had not changed. She need not have been afraid. No man who had had the marvellous good luck to win her love could be so mad as to throw it away. I am afraid the mother does not like my refusing to fall in with her plans, but what could I do? It is a pleasure to feel that you at all events take my view. I must write to her next week and tell her once more that come what may I will never give Helen up. I am going off to-night to join Colonel Treveryan in killing a man-eater not far from here. I hope we shall have some fun. Good-bye. Be a good boy.—Yours ever, GUY.

This letter Guy read over and folded up, and as he did so, a puzzled smile came over his face. It was odd to think he was beginning to take Ro seriously, and to value his opinion. As he finished addressing the envelope, he heard Chimp drive up to the door; and he went out to meet him.

‘Hullo, Guy! This is jolly. I thought you weren’t coming till to-morrow.’

‘Well, I wasn’t, but I changed my mind. It was beastly hot in Bombay, and I wanted to get back. Now I am going off again.’

‘Where to?’

‘Well, I met the Treveryans at the station. The Colonel has heard of a man-eater at some place near Ranipore, and is going down to shoot it, and I arranged to go on to-night and join him.’

‘No? What luck some beggars have! I would have given my head to go, and they never thought of asking me.’

‘Well, they didn’t exactly ask me,’ Guy said with a laugh.

‘Oh! you asked yourself, of course—just like your confounded cheek. You might have got me into it too while you were about it.’

Guy had never thought of that, but he did not say so. ‘I couldn’t, Chimp. I don’t suppose there is much spare room in the tents, or grub, or anything.’

‘Well, it’s always the way,’ Chimp answered with a sigh. ‘I have kept your rotten old guns clean for you.’

‘Yes. Many thanks, old chap. I have just been looking at them. By the way, have you got any ball cartridges for my smoothbore? Colonel Treveryan says it’s better than an express for close quarters.’

‘I haven’t got any ready, but we can load up a few after mess in ten minutes. I’ve got a lot of bullets; I cast them one wet day while you were away. When does your train go?’

‘Not till 10.30.’

‘Oh, that’s all right. By George, how I wish I were going with you.’

‘I wish you were.’

There was a moment’s pause, and then Chimp said, ‘I suppose you’ve squared your people?’

‘Well, I’ll tell you all about that afterwards. I think it will be all right. We had better dress now, or we shall be late.’

They dressed and strolled over together, and Guy was received in the anteroom with a hearty welcome. Several of his brother officers were away on leave, but St. Orme and Berry and others were there; and all seemed really glad to see him. Even Denham was civil,—for him. It was very jolly, Guy thought; after all, the regiment was his real home now. And then the reflection came to him, ‘What if you have to leave it?’

The night was hot, and when they sat down Guy said, ‘Chimp, I am going to have some fizz.’

Chimp objected at once. ‘Don’t be an ass. It’s the worst thing you can do. You may have to shoot straight to-morrow. Take a whisky peg and keep your eye clear.’

‘Bosh, Chimp. A glass or two won’t hurt me.’

Chimp gave in. He liked his wine too; indeed, he liked a good ‘whack’ of it on occasion. Temperance with him was simply a sacrifice to his deity; he could not drink much and keep ‘fit.’ That night,

however, they were very moderate, and immediately after dinner they went off together to get their cartridges ready. While Guy changed his clothes, Chimp cleared the sitting-room table of books and tablecloth, and put upon it a teacup full of powder, and some cartridge-cases, and the various things required for loading them. 'How many do you want?' he said, as Guy came in.

Guy suggested fifty.

Chimp scoffed aloud. 'Fifty! My dear old boy, you don't suppose you're going to put them up in whisps like snipe?'

'No; but I like having plenty of ammunition. One never knows what one may want on a shoot.'

'You can't want fifty, anyhow. Why, you'd fill him up with lead like the jumping-frog. Ten's plenty.'

Eventually they compromised for twenty-five, and by the time these were ready it was nearly ten o'clock, and the dog-cart came round. Chimp drove Guy down and saw him off, envying him deeply, and wishing him all good luck.

As the train steamed slowly out of the hot bright station into the darkness, Guy put his legs up on the seat, and sat looking out of the open window while the cool night air blew on his face. It was a very pleasant hour's journey. The sight of Helen had set all his blood going again, and he was more in love than ever; and to add to his happiness there was the strange new excitement of his first attempt at tiger-

shooting. He had been a little tired that afternoon, after the long journey from Bombay, but his arrival had shaken him up and he felt quite fresh again now. How jolly it all was !

At half-past eleven the train ran into Ranipore, and stopped with many jolts, after the manner of Indian trains, and Guy got out. It was a very small station, with two or three rooms on one side of the line, and a covered waiting-shed on the other. The native station-master came up to him as he stood on the silent little platform and told him there were some coolies to carry his baggage to the camp, and that the Commissioner Sahib had sent a pony for him. He mounted and rode away down a soft unmetalled road, the barefooted coolies walking behind him with his boxes on their heads. The night was cool enough now, and not very dark ; there were clouds, but the stars were shining in the blue openings between them, and all promised a fine day. About midnight they reached the camp, which consisted of a couple of square tents for the white men under some mango trees, with smaller tents behind for the servants.

There was a light in one of the tents, and there Guy found Colonel Treveryan and Goldney having an interview with a native *shikari*, whom Colonel Treveryan had sent out to bring the latest news. The man's report was satisfactory enough. There had been a bullock killed the night before ; and the tiger had been tracked to a patch of jungle, where it lay up

during the day. The footmarks were quite clear in the soft earth. In the evening, after dark, it had returned to the kill. The man had been watching in a tree in the line of its approach, and had seen it pass. After remaining some time over the kill, where he could hear it feeding, it had repassed him and gone away towards the same jungle to which it had been tracked in the morning. There was water there. Having waited some time, he had come down from his tree. Early in the morning, directly it was light, he would follow up the pugs and make sure where the beast was. Meanwhile, he said, he was not sure that this was the same animal. He had seen the marks of the one that killed the woman, and he thought they were smaller, but it might be the same.

Colonel Treveryan asked a few questions and then dismissed the man. 'I don't quite understand it,' he said; 'some of the things they have been telling me don't look as if the beast were a man-eater. However, I suppose there is no doubt that the woman was killed, and the people are certainly in a great funk. Anyhow, we had better turn in now; it's getting late. We shall know more in the morning. We have got a bed for you, and put it in Goldney's tent,' he added, turning to Guy. Goldney got up and said good-night; as he walked out Guy said to Colonel Treveryan, 'Can I speak to you for a minute before I go?'

'Certainly. Sit down; I am in no hurry.'

Goldney walked out into the darkness with a tightening at his heart, and Guy took his chair.

‘Well, Langley,’ Colonel Treveryan said, ‘what is your news?’

‘Well, sir, I don’t quite know what to say, except that I believe it will be all right in the end about my people.’

‘Did you come to any understanding?’

‘Not exactly, sir; but I think it will be all right now. The fact is, my mother wanted me to marry some one she has taken a fancy to, but I think she understands now that this is impossible, and that if she insists it may mean my staying in India for good.’

‘Then they did not withdraw their objections?’

‘Not openly, but I am sure they will give in now.’

‘Then you stand very much where you were?’

‘Yes, just at present, but it won’t last, and meanwhile we can manage, sir, I’m sure.’

‘What do you want to do, then? Do you intend to stay in your regiment?’

‘I really am not sure, sir. I thought I would ask your advice. I am ready to do anything you think right, if only,—you will agree to our marriage.’

So that was the end of it, Colonel Treveryan thought. Everything just in the same position as before. Well, it was too late to think it all out to-night.

After a minute he got up. 'We had better sleep on it, Langley. I can't see my way clear yet, and it is getting late. We must be up early to-morrow. Good-night. Breakfast at seven.'

'Good-night. I hope, sir, you don't blame me; I have done my best.'

'No, my dear fellow; I wish things were all settled, but I'm sure it isn't your fault. We'll talk it over to-morrow. Good-night.'

Guy walked over to Goldney's tent, and found the little Pink 'un kneeling by his bedside in a night-shirt, like a child, saying his prayers.

Guy motioned to his servant to stay outside, and began undressing very quietly. 'What an honest little beggar it is,' he thought, with a touch of pity, and a feeling that all the same it was not quite the thing for Goldney to be saying his prayers like that, with the native servants about. But the native servants thought the better of him; they did not practise or understand reserve in these matters.

The bed was a comfortable one with a spring mattress of broad woven tape, Goldney having, in fact, handed over his own for Guy's use, and taken for himself a short native *charpoy*, strung with cord, which his men had got from a neighbouring police-station. The night was calm and still. A faint breeze occasionally rustled the leaves above the tent, and from the distance came the barking of some village dogs; the

frogs were croaking in the tank behind the trees; the *shikari* was refreshing himself after his labours by smoking a pipe, and Guy could hear the gurgle of the water in the coconut bowl: with these sounds in his ears he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXIV

A MORNING'S SHOOTING

GUY woke with a delightful sense of excitement; and as the occurrences of the previous evening came back to his mind, he felt supremely happy. He sat up in bed, and found that Goldney was drinking a cup of tea, while another cup was on the chair by his bedside.

The young men were dressed and out of the tent half an hour later; and having put his guns together and got ready his cartridge-belt and bag, Guy strolled off to see what was going on in camp. It was a bright sunny morning. Colonel Treveryan was in his tent, and Guy did not like to disturb him. Under the trees at the back Guy found the servants cooking breakfast in round pans, which were placed on the ground across two wedge-shaped fire-holes. In an open space near the tank some elephants were having their howdahs fastened on with girths made of hide and massive iron chains; it seemed a slow and troublesome process. Guy walked up to one of the kneeling beasts and stood looking at

its little pig-like eye and bristly scalp till he was warned that he had better not come too close; it was sometimes vicious. He went back to the tents, and found Colonel Treveryan standing in the open talking to some natives, with Goldney near him.

‘Come along, Langley,’ he said; ‘it’s all right. They say the tiger is in the same patch. We shall know for certain when Khema comes in; but they say they are sure of it. The sooner we’re ready the better. It will take us a good hour to get there.’

They had breakfast,—a very substantial one—and then climbed up on to their elephants, Colonel Treveryan going alone in one howdah, and Guy and Goldney together in another.

As Colonel Treveryan started he lighted a cheroot, and opened the canvas bag containing his letters, which had been sent on from Syntia the night before. Before breakfast he had answered one or two telegrams, and disposed of everything requiring immediate action. Now he went through his *dāk* again quietly, putting aside two or three private letters which he stuck into the rack by his rifle-stocks. The letters bearing official stamps he read and put back one after another into the bag. There was nothing particular in them, but the Government was worrying him again, in a rather nasty tone, for some useless returns which he had found much difficulty in extracting from his subordinates. The Government

was itself being worried by the Secretary of State for India, who was being worried by a troublesome Member of the House of Commons, who neither knew nor cared anything at all about the matter and merely wanted to bring himself to notice. But Treveryan did not know all this. 'Confound those secretariat fellows!' he said; 'always the same. There is not a man up at headquarters who knows anything about the country; nothing but old office-hacks and boys who think it clever to write impertinent letters.' He sighed and tied up the bag again. How tired he was sometimes of the whole thing! Success and reward always went to the unscrupulous and the pushing. It was useless to do your duty like an Englishman; writing was everything, particularly writing oneself up in the newspapers.

He put the bag away under his seat and took up his private letters. There were only three,—one was from England in an unknown hand, and two bore Indian stamps. He opened the Indian letters first. Nothing to answer, thank goodness. One was a receipt from a tradesman in Bombay, and the other a few lines from a friend thanking him for a small service. The English letter Colonel Treveryan opened without curiosity. Some one, he supposed, who had an idle son to be provided for and wanted his help in getting an appointment. It was Charles Langley's letter about Guy.

As Treveryan read it his bronzed cheek grew red,

and an angry light came into his eyes. 'Damn his impudence!' he said; 'he writes as if he were a duke and Helen were a barmaid.'

Then his anger turned upon Guy. The letter was strangely inconsistent with Guy's account of the state of affairs. For a time Colonel Treveryan chafed hotly against the whole thing; and if Guy had been in the howdah with him at the time, there would have been some sharp words spoken. Happily Guy was some way behind chatting with Goldney, and looking at the low wooded hills which they were approaching by a cart track through the long rank grass. Colonel Treveryan had plenty of time, therefore, to think matters over, and as he was an eminently placable man, his anger soon cooled down. After all, he thought, it was not so much the boy's fault. He had stuck to Helen in spite of them, and apparently had done his best. Very likely the letter misrepresented him deliberately, in the hope of making mischief. Anyhow, Helen's happiness was concerned. She evidently cared for him, and he certainly was a fine young fellow, and seemed to be in earnest. He was young and rather sketchy, 'but we have all been young.'

By the time the elephants had crossed the grass plain and reached the hilly ground, Colonel Treveryan was himself again. Here they were met by the *shikari*, who told them there was no doubt about the *khubber*; the tiger had been marked down to

a certainty. They went a little farther, by a rocky path through the woods, the great heavy beasts climbing slowly over the most difficult places where a horse could not have been ridden or even led. Then they came to an open patch where the party dismounted; the rest of the way had to be done on foot. It was not far, perhaps half a mile, and the late break in the rains had dried the jungle, so that the walking was not very bad. In a quarter of an hour they reached their ground.

They stood on the crest of a wooded spur which ran down from the hills above on the right, and formed one side of a ravine about three hundred yards in breadth. Both sides of this ravine were in most places rocky and rather precipitous, though of no great height. At the bottom was the bed of a mountain stream which made its way down through several rocky channels, enclosing two or three long jungle-covered islands. In one of these was their game.

They had two difficulties to contend with. In the first place, though the weather had been fine for some days and the stream was almost dry, yet the grass and jungle were very thick. Secondly, the ground was such that they could not use elephants, and the beaters were very much afraid of the tiger who bore a bad reputation. They did not much fancy their work, and were not likely to do it very thoroughly. However, there was nothing to be

gained by delay. While Khema had come in to report, his brother had collected and placed the beaters, two hundred of them, who were hidden away on the wooded hill-side to the right, forming a crescent round the top of the ravine. The brothers had communicated with one another when the Sahibs arrived, and all was said to be in readiness, though the little army was as completely invisible as Roderick Dhu's clansmen on the side of Benledi. After a short conversation, carried on in low tones, it was arranged that one of the guns should be posted near the spot where they stood, but lower down the side of the ravine, so as to command the bed of the stream, or one channel of it. Another gun was to be placed across the ravine on the opposite side, to command the farther channel. The third was to occupy a rock in the bottom of the ravine to the left. This rock formed the upper end of an island, the bed of the stream joining in front of it, and parting again to right and left. There was a broad open space in front of the rock.

It fell to Guy's lot to remain on the left bank. Colonel Treveryan was to go across the ravine, and Goldney to have the centre place.

Colonel Treveryan went off, taking Goldney with him, and leaving Khema to look after Guy. As a parting injunction he said, 'Now, look here, Langley; find yourself a good place where you can use your guns freely; a tree or a rock twelve or fifteen feet

high at least,—a rock where you can stand up for choice. If possible, don't fire till he is past you, and then aim behind the shoulder; and remember, whatever you do, don't be tempted to go down into the jungle if you've hit him.'

Guy said 'All right, sir.' And the little procession disappeared silently in the wood to the left.

When they had gone, Khema crept off down the side of the ravine, carrying Guy's rifle. Guy followed him until they came near a large rock, which caught the man's eye. Motioning to Guy to stay where he was, Khema examined the rock, and found a way to get upon it, with the help of a wild mango tree which had grown through a cleft. Guy climbed up without difficulty, and found himself in an ideal position. He was almost hidden by thick boughs, but he could see through them in all directions, and there was plenty of room to use his weapons. Twenty yards below him was the broad river-bed, with the water lying here and there in pools among the boulders. His right was covered by one of these pools. To get across it an animal would have had to swim. To his front, across the channel, was a piece of rough broken ground, a low island, in fact, with a good deal of thick new grass on it, but with bare patches of water and rock. To his left the bed of the stream was broad and open. The face of the rock was sheer, indeed slightly overhanging, and about ten feet in height; at the

back it was more broken and less precipitous. Guy lay down with a contented mind upon the hard gray stone. 'Well, I'm safe enough here,' he thought. 'Nothing but a bird could reach me; and I can see all round.'

He had to wait some time, for Colonel Treveryan had a long circuit to make, and the stony seat began to cramp Guy's unaccustomed limbs; but he had everything a man can have in this world to make him happy, and he was happy. The morning was very still. There was not a sound to be heard in the jungle but the occasional faint whisper of the breeze, and the distant ringing note of the 'coppersmith' barbet,—*tonk, tonk, tonk*. It was frightfully hot, and Guy was bathed in perspiration. At last, in about half an hour, after he had shifted his position several times, Khema touched him and pointed to a rock on the opposite side of the ravine. Knowing exactly where to look, he had seen Colonel Treveryan take up his place. Goldney was doubtless in his, though they could not see him.

A minute or two later a lookout man on a high point up the hill-side to the right gave the expected signal, and the drive began. Guy's heart beat fast as the first distant sound of the drum broke upon his ears, and was followed by an outburst of wild yells. He fixed his eyes on the river-bed below and waited with growing excitement, every sense on the stretch, lest the tiger should rush past and escape. In this way

minute after minute slipped away. The shouting and the drumming came nearer and nearer, falling at times almost into silence and then rising again with a sudden burst, but always coming on; and now he could occasionally make out in the distance a dark form standing for a moment upon some rocky point and then sinking into the jungle again. He felt himself trembling with excitement. Would it never end? Surely if there were a tiger he must have broken before now. The beaters must be within three or four hundred yards. He could see them distinctly now when they showed out of the jungle. As he looked away towards them he felt his leg gently pressed, and turned his eyes. Khema was gazing out straight in front of him into the bed of the stream.

Guy never forgot that moment. He had been waiting to hear a rush through the grass, and to get a glimpse of a tiger galloping past him from the right at a speed that would almost defy a shot. He looked up now to see about fifty yards off, in an open stony place between some bushes, a great yellow beast that stood motionless in front of him, its head turned in the direction of the beaters, and its broad white throat and breast offering a perfect mark. For an instant he could hardly believe that such luck had come to him, or that any tiger could be as huge as this. Then he raised his gun, and as he did so, the tiger's quick eye was attracted by the movement, and it turned its head towards him with a start. Guy fired and felt he had

hit. Through the smoke he saw the animal bound aside into the bushes, and then he thought he could make it out dimly, crouching with its head towards him. He fired his second barrel, but rather hastily, without a very clear aim. There was a waving in the bushes and grass, and he could see nothing more.

'*Laga, laga,*' Khema said; 'you have hit him,' handing up the loaded rifle, which Guy took in exchange for his gun.

As the shots rang out the shouting and drumming had suddenly ceased. Now they burst out in the wildest uproar, which went on for a few seconds and ceased again. Looking away to the right, Guy could see several men standing on high points out of the wooded hill-side. The line seemed to be stationary. He was wondering what would be done next when he heard two shots almost simultaneously on his left, and looking round saw Goldney standing out in full view at the edge of his rock. The tiger had evidently sneaked through the bushes and tried to get away down stream. A few seconds later Goldney fired again, and then Guy caught sight of the animal. Turned by Goldney's first two shots, it had broken back, and was now galloping through the bushes along the opposite side of the ravine, straight for the point where Colonel Treveryan was posted. It was useless for Guy to fire again. The bushes and grass were thick and he only caught a glimpse of the yellow skin at intervals as it flashed across some small opening.

He waited in breathless suspense, gazing at the rock in front of him, where he could now clearly make out Colonel Treveryan, who had stood up in readiness. Suddenly Guy saw him step forward and fire down one shot; then he slowly lowered his gun and seemed to be looking over the edge of his rock.

At the foot of it the beast lay dead, with a bullet through the back of its skull. When fired at by Goldney it had chosen for its line of escape a track leading straight over the face of Colonel Treveryan's rock, which projected horizontally from the steep hill-side. As it came within a few yards, Colonel Treveryan's man, who was crouching near him, had jumped to his feet in sudden alarm, brandishing his hatchet, and the tiger, instead of charging over them, had 'shied' and tried to pass underneath.

There was silence among the beaters now, and Guy asked Khema what was up; but his Hindustani was small, and he could not make out the answer. Khema was looking across the ravine with an attentive face. At last Colonel Treveryan called out, 'All right, he's dead,' and disappeared from his rock.

Guy was about to get down too, intending to go over and see the tiger, when Khema stopped him. Guy did not know what the man said, but he seemed very earnest and evidently objected to the move. Guy accordingly sat down again and waited as patiently as he could. Then Khema called across the ravine with a long-drawn wailing note, 'Eh, Juggoo—oo—oo!'

There was an answering call from Juggoo, and then a short conversation in unintelligible patois. After two or three minutes of this Khema seemed satisfied; he shouted back a word or two which evidently signified agreement, and then he turned to Guy and motioned to him to sit quiet. Eventually he succeeded in making Guy understand that Colonel Treveryan was coming round to him, and that perhaps the tiger which Colonel Treveryan had killed might not be the same one as he had fired at; he held up two fingers and said '*Do!*' For a full quarter of an hour Guy possessed his soul in patience. There was not a sound to be heard from the beaters; nothing but the whisper of the breeze again, and the ringing note of the copper-smith in the distance. The whole thing seemed to have been a dream. Guy's mouth felt parched, and he was very thirsty. At last Khema turned and looked into the jungle behind; his trained ear had caught the sound of approaching steps. Shortly afterwards Colonel Treveryan appeared, with Goldney and their two gun-bearers. Making as little noise as possible, the two Englishmen joined Guy on his rock, and then Colonel Treveryan had a short conversation with Khema which seemed to please him. He turned to Guy.

'Khema is sure you wounded the one you fired at, and he does not think it could have got away to the left from where it was without his seeing it. If you did hit it there must be two, because the one I killed

was not touched. He has only one bullet in him. Do you think you hit him ?'

'I'm almost sure I did. I felt I was on him, and it was an easy shot.'

'Well, we must look him up somehow. I wish we could bring an elephant round. Where was he when you fired ?'

Guy and Colonel Treveryan stepped forward to the edge of the rock. Guy had been seen on it, so there was no use in concealment now. Goldney, who was overwhelmed with misery and shame, having got flurried and missed at thirty yards with both barrels, stood close by them, but on the other side of the tree which grew through the stone. Standing in full view, and holding his rifle in his left hand, Guy stretched out his right arm and pointed to the place where he had seen the tiger. 'That is where he was standing when I saw him first, between those bushes. When I fired he jumped into that bush to the right, and I fired again. It seemed to me that he bolted in that direction.'

As Guy spoke there was a sudden disturbance in the grass and bushes at the place towards which he was pointing, and a sound which made his heart stand still. It was not a roar, but a quick guttural *wuh*, *wuh*, of such tremendous depth and power that it seemed to shake the very rock upon which they stood. The next instant Guy saw through the grass the great yellow beast rushing upon them.

He fired both barrels, and Colonel Treveryan did the same, with a little more deliberation, but apparently with no greater success. It does not take a tiger long to cover fifty yards of ground, and through the smoke of the fourth shot Guy saw the vicious-looking head, with its flattened ears and gleaming teeth, rise straight at the place where he stood. He was no coward, and he gripped his rifle for a blow, which would have been quite useless; but as he did so he stepped back involuntarily, and his foot slipped upon the sloping stone. In trying to save himself he fell forward on his hands, scraping his knuckles severely and cracking a piece almost loose from the point of his rifle-stock. Within a few feet of him were the bloody head and forepaws of the wounded tiger, which had reached the edge of the rock in its bound, and was struggling to draw itself up.

That momentary struggle saved them. Goldney had luckily not seen the charging beast in time to throw away his cartridges; and now, being as staunch a little gentleman as ever walked, he lowered his rifle, and with the muzzle almost touching emptied two barrels into the beast's throat and neck, and fairly blew it off the rock.

When Guy scrambled to his feet, Colonel Treveryan was reloading swiftly. Having done so, he looked over the edge. Guy followed his example. The tiger was lying on its back, with gasping mouth and twitching limbs.

Then the three of them looked at one another for an instant, as men do after a house has been struck by lightning. The Pink 'un was not pink, but very white, and his hand was trembling. Guy felt he was looking shaky too, and even Treveryan was breathing hard. 'By Jove!' he said at last, with a deep sigh of relief, 'that was a close shave. You deserve a V. C., Goldney. If you had not been so steady it would have gone hard with us. You saved us all.'

Then the boy's colour came back in a wave, and he looked supremely happy. He had redeemed himself and shown that he was not a coward, thank God! He did thank God, humbly and earnestly, from the bottom of his brave young heart, as he stood there in the sun, his blushing face covered with sweat and grimed with smoke—an English gentleman.

Khema and his fellows had naturally vanished when the scrimmage began; but they were not far off, and they soon reappeared, Khema the first; he had only got up the tree.

Then the tiger was cautiously examined, and found to be quite dead. Poor beast, it well might be. Guy's first shot had passed through its forearm close to the body, which had probably prevented it from getting on to the rock at once. The skin was grazed in two places—one on the head and one on the shoulder, apparently by bullets fired at it while it was charging. The right side of the throat and neck was blackened by Goldney's shells, and one of them had torn its way

right through and out on the other side. This animal was a fine young tigress. The other which Colonel Treveryan had shot was an old male, with blunt yellow teeth.

It was a very happy day. They had a sup of whisky and water all round, and the natives slung the two dead tigers on poles and carried them down to the place where the elephants were waiting. There, while the Sahibs sat in the shade of a tree and ate some lunch, the game was transferred to the backs of two pad elephants, after much trumpeting and objection on their part; then the beaters were dismissed with a lordly *bakshish*, and the procession started for camp.

What a luxurious warm tub that was in the evening, and how delicious Guy's loose clean flannel suit felt, and how impossible it seemed to him that he would ever slake his thirst; and how enormous the bare limbs of the tigers looked when the skin had been stripped from them and pegged out, and the twisted rolls of muscle were shown in all their tremendous strength. No wonder a blow from such an arm meant death. Under the old male tiger's skin, over the ribs, they found two small round bullets which had been fired long ago by some native *shikari*.

They had a delightful dinner in Colonel Treveryan's tent, and then sat smoking and discussing every feature of the day's adventures. They decided that the old male tiger had killed the woman, and that there was no sport in the world like tiger-shooting, and many

other things. The young men did most of the talking; Treveryan listened to them with pleasure in his eyes, throwing in a word now and then. At ten o'clock, much against his inclination, Goldney, who was always thoughtful, felt that it was time for him to leave the others to themselves. He got up and went off to bed, and as he went Colonel Treveryan said to him, 'Good-night, Goldney; but for you we should not all be here.'

Then he turned to Guy. 'What a game little chap that is,' he said. 'Now, Langley, let us have our talk.'

'I'm ready, sir.'

'Well, in the first place, I suppose you did not see your father's letter to me before he sent it?'

'No. Did he write? When?'

'I got the letter this morning.'

'What does it say?'

'Well, it gives a rather different account of things from what you gave me. I think you had better see it.' Colonel Treveryan took it out of his pocket, where he had put it before dinner.

Guy read it, and gave it back with surprise in his face. 'I cannot imagine what made my father write like that. The fact is, that he did not know much about it. It was my mother who always talked to me about these things.'

'Yes; but I suppose he would speak to her before writing.'

‘I suppose so,’ Guy answered, well knowing that the letter was really his mother’s writing; ‘but I cannot understand it. I warned my mother most distinctly that I could never change, even if it involved remaining in India for good.’

Colonel Treveryan would have understood without difficulty if he had known all Guy knew, but he had never heard of Clara Schneider, and the whole thing puzzled him. On the one side was this letter, on the other Guy’s eager eyes and confident assertions. He did not answer, but sat smoking silently, trying to think it out. Seeing the hesitation in his face, Guy went on again: ‘I am sure of one thing, sir, that if my people really had any doubt when I was in England, they cannot possibly doubt much longer. Before I left Syntia last night I wrote home and said I had met you and spoke quite plainly about it all.’

Guy persuaded himself that this statement was not untrue. They sat together an hour longer, talking across the camp table on which they had dined. A brass wall-lamp was hung by a strap from the tent-pole above them, and some insects had got into the tent and fluttered round it. From his position opposite the doorway Guy could see in the darkness, beyond the palm trees, an occasional shimmer of lightning. On the table were a couple of long tumblers, and a brass saucer which Colonel Treveryan used for an ash-tray. The night was very hot, but they were in loose cool clothing, and did not feel it much. As the talk

went on Guy's eagerness increased; he was inclined to take a very bright view of everything that night. India seemed to him a delightful land of adventure and romance, and he wondered how he could ever have wished to stay at home and shoot partridges. His face looked strikingly handsome in its enthusiasm, and Colonel Treveryan could not help liking and trusting him. His voice and his eyes seemed true, and he spoke well and boldly.

At last Colonel Treveryan got up. His cheroot was nearly finished, and, lifting the hanging mat, he tossed the end out of the doorway into the darkness; as it struck the ground it flashed and threw off some sparks. 'Well, Langley,' he said, 'we must make the best of it. I feel sure you have done what you could, and we will manage somehow. Good-night now. It is time we went to bed.'

Guy got up too and held out his hand. 'Good-night, sir. I am very grateful for your kindness. You shall never repent it.'

They stood looking at one another for a second, and then dropped each other's hands and parted. As they did so, Colonel Treveryan said to himself, 'I think it is all right. I can trust him.'

Guy went to his tent and undressed quietly. Goldney was asleep. A cool wind had risen, and was sighing fitfully through the trees overhead, making the palm fronds clatter at times and rustling the mango leaves. There was lightning in the sky, and

now Guy could hear a distant rumble of thunder. Some peacocks woke up and screamed to each other through the darkness. Then it began to rain, a few heavy drops, which fell like bullets upon the roof of the tent. As the shower ceased Guy got into bed and almost immediately fell asleep.

The storm came up an hour or two later, and the rain was heavy ; but Guy was tired and knew little about it. In the morning, when he woke, he was vaguely conscious that there had been thunder during the night and the air felt cool, but he had slept peacefully through it all.

CHAPTER XXV

AN ACCIDENT

It was a delightful morning, cool and bright. They had breakfasted and sat smoking in Colonel Treveryan's tent, while the servants packed for a start. The train left for Syntia at half-past nine. When they mounted to ride to the station their things had gone on; the tents and heavy baggage were to follow by a later train.

The animals had had a day's rest in camp, and the rain-freshened air had acted upon their spirits. Goldney's *tattoo*, a cream-coloured country-bred with pink extremities, which was generally said to be exactly like its master, came up quietly enough; but Guy's pony kicked and squealed, and Colonel Treveryan's young Waler mare, which he had lately bought to replace old Romulus who had suddenly taken to roaring, gave some trouble before he could mount her. He got the better of her before long; but even when he had settled himself into the saddle she was very fidgety, sidling along with quivering ears and little jumps of excitement; she evidently wanted exercise.

The road to the station was soft, and the dust had been laid by the rain. As they got on to the road Colonel Treveryan said, 'Come along, let us give them a canter,' and the mare sprang off impetuously. They had about a quarter of a mile of open ground before them, and then the road turned sharply to the right behind a large grove of mango trees, which prevented them from seeing any farther. The mare seemed to be going steadily enough when she came up to the bend, and Guy, cantering a few yards behind, was admiring her easy level action. The trees were to their right; to the left was an open field, separated from the road by a low mud wall or bank, in bad repair and overgrown with tussocks of coarse grass. Under this bank, in the hollow by the roadside, a little water was lying. Unluckily, as they turned the corner they came suddenly, at a distance of a few yards, upon one of the camp elephants, which had started on its way to the station. Something had gone wrong with its load, and it had been stopped on the right-hand side of the road, while the driver put matters straight. As the horses came round the corner, the great timid beast rushed forward in sudden alarm. Guy saw the mare shy violently and swerve to the left, slipping as she did so on the wet sloping grass. The next instant she had splashed through the water, and had gone headlong over the mud-bank into the field beyond.

It was a nasty fall. In her fright and hurry she took the jump sideways, looking away to the right at

the object that had frightened her. It seemed to Guy that she hardly rose at all. She struck the bank and turned fairly over, and he caught a glimpse of an upturned belly and some glittering shoes in the air. The whole thing did not last a second. Guy's pony shied too, but not badly, and he pulled it up without trouble. As he did so, the mare struggled to her feet and trotted off across the field with her head high, trailing a broken rein; her rider lay still where he had fallen.

Guy jumped off his pony and scrambled over into the field. 'Are you hurt, sir?' he called out anxiously. Treveryan did not answer. Guy knelt down beside him and lifted up his head. He groaned, but seemed quite insensible. There was a little blood on his mouth.

After a time, as he showed no sign of reviving, they sent for his bed, which was still in the tent, and placing him upon it, had him carried back to camp. He lay quite still, with his eyes shut, moaning a little at times. While Guy went back with him, Goldney galloped off to the railway station and sent a telegram to Dr. Beamish, telling him what had happened, and begging him to come at once; there was a train which he would just be able to catch.

For the next two hours the young men watched anxiously by Colonel Treveryan's bed. They had loosened his clothes, and moistened his lips with brandy, but without effect, and they did not know what else to do.

The telegram luckily caught Beamish at home, and he arrived about twelve o'clock; but directly he had made his examination, it was evident that he regarded the case as a very serious one. There was apparently some injury to the spine; it might be only a temporary shock, but it might be more. Colonel Treveryan was not to be moved, and Miss Treveryan had better be summoned.

Guy sent off a message to her: 'I am sorry to say Colonel Treveryan has been hurt by horse falling with him. Dr. Beamish is here, and says he must not be moved at present, and wishes me to tell you. Can you come? There is a tent for you. Will meet you at station.'

Helen's heart sank as the telegram was brought to her. The Rushtons had breakfasted late; and she was sitting at the table when the servant came in with the brown envelope.

Her host saw it, and said, 'Hurrah! Now we shall hear what luck they had.'

She opened the envelope, and they saw her turn very white. 'When does the next train go for Ranipore?' she asked.

'In about an hour,' Rushton answered, and Mrs. Rushton said, 'What is it? Nothing wrong, I hope?'

'Yes; my father is hurt,' and she gave the telegram to Mrs. Rushton. 'Oh, I am afraid it must be something dreadful. Do you think he is killed, and that they have not told me?'

Mrs. Rushton read over the telegram. 'Oh no, dear. Your father rides very hard, and has had a good many accidents of that kind. He broke his collar-bone out pig-sticking with Henry two or three years ago. You must not imagine anything dreadful.' But her face belied her words. She felt that if there had been any definite injury they would have said so. Rushton was silent, and Helen went off to get ready for her journey, with a horrible fear at her heart. Mrs. Rushton offered to accompany her, but Helen preferred to go alone. Her *ayah* was accustomed to camp, she said, and would take care of her; if she wanted help she would telegraph. An hour later Rushton had seen her into the train, and she was on her way to Ranipore.

It was still early in the afternoon when she arrived. She had done all she could on the journey to strengthen herself for whatever might be before her, trying to be prepared for the worst, but praying hard that all might be well. The poor old *ayah* was voluble in her attempts at consolation; but she saw it was useless, and gave it up. She crouched on the floor of the carriage, gazing at her mistress, who sat upright in motionless impatience, or leant with closed eyes against the window frame. As the train slackened to run into Ranipore, Helen looked out to the place where she knew the camp stood; she thought she could make out a white tent among the trees. Perhaps he was lying there dead! The moment the train stopped, Guy was in her carriage.

‘How is he?’ she said eagerly. ‘He is not dead?’

Guy looked at her pleading eyes and longed to be able to comfort her. He kissed her gently. ‘No, darling. I hope he may be all right soon, but the mare came down and rolled over him, and he has been unconscious ever since. Beamish is with him, but can say nothing yet, except that he thinks there are no bones broken.’

‘Thank God he is alive,’ she said, and she got out of the carriage. ‘Never mind the things. My *ayah* will bring them on. Let us start at once.’

Guy had brought some men over to carry her baggage, and for herself there was a native palanquin. Guy told her all about it as they went, walking beside her in the fierce August heat. They could hardly have talked to each other if he had mounted his pony. She listened to him quietly, pressing back the tears that would come to her eyes. ‘They are going too fast for you,’ she said, as she saw Guy striding out hard to keep up with the pattering trot of the *palki* bearers, and she made them go more slowly. When he had told her all she thanked him for what he had done. ‘I’m so glad you were with him. I know you have done everything that is possible. It was a great comfort to me to feel that he had you here. Is Mr. Goldney here still?’

‘Yes.’

‘How are you going to manage about tents? I am afraid you will be very uncomfortable.’

‘Oh, we’re all right,’ Guy said. ‘We have got one of the servants’ tents, and there is a police-station not far off.’

‘I must see when I get there.’

Guy was wondering at her. He had not expected her to break down and be useless, but her quiet business-like tone was a surprise to him. They were both silent for a little while, and then he said, ‘We are close by now. That is where it happened.’

Helen looked out and saw the place. There was a long downward cut in the wet turf and mud where the mare had slipped, and the bank beyond was newly broken. She fancied she could see her father lying out there in the field, motionless and moaning with pain. A half-suppressed sob escaped from her, and after a moment she spoke with a voice which trembled a little. ‘Guy.’

‘Darling.’

‘How long shall you be able to stay?’

‘As long as I can be of the smallest use.’

He put his hand on hers as it lay by her side. She did not answer, but she took his hand and held it hard till they reached camp.

All that afternoon and evening and through the night Colonel Treveryan remained insensible. Helen and Beamish watched him, and Guy and Goldney lay in the servants’ tent behind. At dinner-time Helen came out and saw that they had some food. She sat with them for a few minutes at a little table in the

open, and they made her eat something too. Then she went back to her father. In the early morning, before sunrise, the clouded brain cleared and Colonel Treveryan awoke to consciousness. He lay for a minute or two thinking it out, and then opened his eyes and saw Beamish sitting by him. He seemed to know all that had happened, and the only question he asked was, 'Is my daughter here?'

'Yes. She came last night. How do you feel now? Are you in pain?'

'No, not much.'

Helen was in her tent. Beamish had insisted upon her trying to get some sleep, promising that he would wake her if there were any change. She was not asleep, but kneeling by her bedside begging for her father's life. Over and over again the same prayer: 'Let him not die! O God, let him not die!' It seemed to her that she could not get the prayer *home*; there was always something barring the way, and it fell back upon her. Was it her want of faith? Would her father die because she had no faith? The thought tortured her, and she prayed desperately. 'I do believe. I do believe,' she said to herself, with her teeth set and her hands clenched tight. 'I do believe. I will believe.' Suddenly she raised her head, her eyes dilated, and a listening look on her face. She could hear them distinctly speaking in her father's tent. She could not make out the words, but she recognised Beamish's gruff voice, and now and then her father's softer tones.

Her first impulse was to go to them at once, but she restrained herself. Beamish would surely call her, and perhaps she ought to stay where she was until he did so.

She waited impatiently, minute after minute, but still no message came. At times there was silence, and then the murmur of voices began again. At last she could bear it no longer. Perhaps Beamish thought her asleep and did not like to wake her. As if any sleep could do her as much good as the news that her father was safe. She rose from her knees, and stole over to the door of the other tent. Through the hanging mat she could see her father clearly. Beamish had turned up the lamp, and was standing by him. Her hand was on the doorway when her father spoke, and she stopped as if turned into stone. His voice was low and not perfectly clear, but she had no difficulty in catching the words. 'My dear fellow,' he said slowly, 'you need not be afraid of telling me the truth. I know it is all over with me. How long do you think it will be?'

Beamish hesitated, and then he answered in a gruff but not ungentle tone, his Irish brogue very strong upon him: 'I can't tell you at all; but I hope there will be no change till the evening anyway.'

Colonel Treveryan was silent, and Helen shrank back by the side of the doorway to control herself. For a full second her heart stopped beating; then it began to throb violently, and as it did so, a convulsion of grief came upon her. She was standing in the

darkness, struggling to repress the sobs that would rise in her throat, when her father spoke again: 'Then don't wake Nellie yet. Let her have her sleep out. Poor little Nell!'

All attempt at self-control was over then. The next instant she was kneeling by his bedside, with her face buried in the clothes, weeping passionately. Then she sprang to her feet. 'Oh, it is not true! It can't be true! Surely you can do something for him?'

Beamish could not meet her eyes. He shook his head and turned away in silence.

Treveryan was the first to speak. 'Sit down, Nell. I want to talk to you.'

She fell on her knees again and took his hand in both of hers. She was quieter now, and felt ashamed of having made things worse for him. Beamish walked out of the tent. 'I shall be just outside,' he said. 'Call me whenever you want me.'

The father and daughter remained alone for an hour or more, and most of the time the dying man was the speaker. He began by asking her a question which jarred upon her. 'Forgive me, Nell,' he said, 'for asking you again, but are you perfectly sure you care for Langley still?'

'Don't let us talk about that now, father dear.'

'But I must, Nell. Don't you see what it is to me now? If I know that is all right it will make me perfectly happy. Are you quite sure you care for him?'

Helen felt at the moment as if she cared less than she had ever done, but she answered steadily: 'Quite sure, father.'

It was the answer she had always given him, and he was satisfied that it was true. 'I am very glad, Nell. You don't know what a comfort it is to feel that I am not leaving you to face the world alone.'

How strong his voice sounded now, almost as strong and clear as ever. Was it possible that he had only a few hours to live?

When the morning broke Treveryan had settled everything. He had told Helen where to find his will and other papers which he wished her to see, and had made her promise that she would not delay her marriage longer than Guy wished. She shrank from this, but her father pressed her. 'I could not be happy,' he said, 'if it were put off. Don't distress me by making me feel that I stand in the way.' Then she gave in, the more readily perhaps because at the moment her thoughts were running on something altogether different. With her strong religious belief and her woman's nature she was anxious now that her father should see a clergyman. She believed he was as good a Christian as ever lived; but he had always been rather careless of religious observances, and this troubled her now. When he seemed to have said all that he had to say, and was lying silent, she suggested it to him.

'Father dear.'

‘Yes, Nell.’

‘Would you like me to send for Mr. Sladen?’

‘Yes, I think I should.’

In reality he cared very little about it. He had no great belief in anything a priest could do for him now. At the same time he had no objection, and he felt that it would be a comfort to Helen.

His answer did comfort her, and she sent off a telegram asking Sladen to come at once. Beamish took it from her. He had come in two or three times to see that all was right, and make Colonel Treveryan take some nourishment, and had then returned to his cane chair and tobacco outside.

It was daylight now, and the little camp was beginning to stir. The sky was clear, and everything gave promise of a fine day. Lying with his eyes closed, Treveryan heard the sounds of awaking life, and thought how he had lain listening to them at the same hour the morning before. What a change between now and then! Yet he did not feel unhappy. He would see Guy in the morning; and if, as he felt confident, the boy behaved well, he could die with an easy mind. He wished he could see them married, but that was impossible. He wished too that he had insured his life as he had intended to do, but it was no use thinking of that now. After all, it would not make a very material difference to them. Then his thoughts turned to his wife. He felt sure she was waiting for him somewhere. He was loose on doctrinal

points, like most of us who have lived long surrounded by millions of non-Christians, many of them God-fearing men, but he had a strong belief in a future life, and he had tried to do his duty. The confident hope of rejoining the one woman he had ever loved robbed death of its terrors. With her gentle face before him he fell into a quiet sleep.

When he woke again the sun was high, and Beamish was sitting at the bedside. He had sent Helen away to dress and get some food.

Colonel Treveryan asked for Guy, who came to him at once. 'I am awfully sorry to see you like this, sir,' Guy said, as he took his hand and sat down.

'It was rather sudden, wasn't it? But these things will happen. How is the mare?'

'She's all right, sir. I wish she were dead.'

'Poor little lady! It was my fault. I ought to have been looking out.' After a moment's silence he went on, 'I wanted to speak to you about Helen.'

'Yes, sir.'

'You know what a difference this will make to her. I said I would give her five hundred a year. Now I am afraid she will not have anything like as much. When everything is settled, there will be perhaps six thousand pounds. That will bring in about two hundred a year. I was going to insure my life for five thousand more, but I have not done it, and the two hundred a year is all she will have.'

‘Yes.’

‘Under the circumstances, are you still Do you still feel as you did about it?’

‘I am not quite sure that I understand you, sir,’ Guy answered slowly.

‘Well, Langley, it is just this: I am very anxious about her; she will have very little now. Do you still ask her to marry you, or does this alter the case?’

Guy’s face was working, and his eyes were full. ‘You can’t mean that, sir? You can’t mean that you think me such a hound as that?’

Treveryan put his hand out. ‘I never thought it would make any difference to you. I did not mean to hurt you. But I wanted to make quite sure that all would be right. She will be alone when I am gone.’

Guy took the outstretched hand and held it. For a few seconds he could not speak, then he answered: ‘You may trust me, sir, on my honour. She is far dearer to me now than she ever was; and nothing on earth shall come between us. My one thought in life will be to make her happy.’ He meant it thoroughly, and Treveryan saw that he meant it.

Guy stayed with him a little longer, and it was settled that the marriage should take place about Christmas. Guy was still confident, indeed more confident than ever, that his father and mother would not continue to oppose it. If by any chance they did so, he would enter the Staff Corps. With what

he had they could live quite well in India. But he was perfectly sure that Lady Mary and her husband would give in now.

Then Treveryan sent for Goldney, and gave him some instructions about official matters. There was nothing of special importance going on, but he wished the boy to take down a few notes which might be of use to his successor. He gave his instructions clearly, and Goldney had no difficulty in following him.

Treveryan's last request was characteristic. One of the landholders of the province, Rajah Jeswant Singh, had got into difficulties, and was being hard pressed by his creditors. He had been very extravagant, and had given much trouble to the District officers, who had already pulled him through more than once. Treveryan was now trying to induce the Government to help him again with a loan. 'Please speak to my successor about it,' he said. 'I think the Government has been rather hard on the poor old fellow. He is extravagant, of course,—they all are,—but he is thoroughly loyal, and we surely ought to stretch a point for men who stood by us when we had our backs to the wall. We shall repent it some day if we forget these things. It is not the University Babus who will fight for us when trouble comes again. You'll be a friend to the old man, won't you? He feels that the generation that knew him is passing away, and that he has few friends left among the Sahib-log. Tell him I did my best for him to the end.'

He was silent for a minute, and lay with closed eyes. Then he continued, 'That's all, Goldney. I can think of nothing else that I need trouble you with.' A faint smile came over his face. 'Those boys in the Secretariat won't get their return out of me after all. But try to get it for them,' he added; 'we must obey orders.' He was evidently getting tired now, and Goldney got up. Colonel Treveryan opened his eyes again. 'Good-bye, Goldney. You are sure to do well. I always felt I could depend upon you, and you behaved splendidly the other day. I wish we had more like you. Good-bye.' The boy held his hand for a second, and walked out of the tent in silence, with a great lump in his throat.

As the hot August day wore on, it was evident that Treveryan was sinking. When Sladen came he roused himself, and he seemed to listen attentively while the Communion service was read to him. Afterwards he thanked Sladen quietly, and said good-bye to him. 'My mind is quite at rest, he said; 'I am perfectly happy. Don't worry yourself about me.' Helen remained with him, sitting by his bedside and doing what little she could to give him relief from the heat, which was very oppressive. His hair and pillow were wet with perspiration; otherwise he did not seem to suffer. Shortly before he died he opened his eyes and looked round the tent. 'Where is Langley?' he asked. Guy was called, and came at

once. 'Stay here, Nellie,' Treveryan said. His voice was very faint now, and not clear. Then he went on: 'You have made me very happy, Langley. You will be good to her?'

'Yes, sir, I will.'

'In sickness and in health,' he said slowly, twice over,—'in sickness and in health, till death do you part.'

Guy knelt down by her, and put his hand on hers. I will, I will, sir. Before God I will !'

Colonel Treveryan's eyes closed again, and a look of satisfaction came over his face. After that he hardly spoke again, or gave any sign of consciousness. As the swift Indian night came down upon the earth, and the air grew cool, he passed quietly away,—so quietly that they hardly knew he had gone. He had done his duty honestly to the end like an English gentleman, without self-assertion and without much personal success, but with lasting benefit to many thousands of dark-skinned men, some of whom were not ungrateful.

They buried him the next day in the little English cemetery at Syntia, under the coarse, rank Indian grass. All around him were the mouldering tombs of men and women whose names have long been forgotten. They had done their duty too, no doubt, and died serving their country, which knew them not. God rest our English dead !

CHAPTER XXVI

GUY LANGLEY LEAVES THE THIRTIETH

THE news of Colonel Treveryan's accident reached Mrs. Aylmer at Mussooree on the day that it occurred. Knowing that she would be painfully interested, her husband had telegraphed to her: 'Colonel Treveryan hurt this morning. Horse fell with him. Has been unconscious several hours. Doctor thinks case very serious.'

Mrs. Aylmer received this message about sunset. It was a rainy afternoon, and she was sitting in the drawing-room with Mabs in front of a comfortable fire of rhododendron logs. She got up and walked to the window, and stood for a minute or two looking out. It was a very dreary prospect. The hill-tops were invisible. Clinging gray clouds hid them from sight, and filled the valleys below them, and curled slowly about their steep, wooded sides. Even the pine trees close to the house were half blotted out; they stood gray and ghostly against the gray sky, and she could see the cloud drifting through their sodden branches. Now and then a light wind shook

them, and made the cloudy veil swirl for a moment, and waved the long hanging festoons of the Virginia creeper. On the gravel in front of the window there was a pool of water, bristling with raindrops, and the wooden gutter outside the verandah was full to overflowing. Mrs. Aylmer sighed and came back to the fireside.

Mabel, who had looked up for a moment, was now deep in her book again. She was sitting curled up in a big armchair, in company with Alice, and the March Hare, and the Hatter, and the Dormouse.

‘Mabs, darling.’

‘Yes, mummie.’ -

‘I have just had a telegram saying Colonel Treveryan is badly hurt, and I must go away and leave you here for a little with Mademoiselle Dufour. You will be very good, won’t you, and not give any trouble? If I have to stay away any time I will send for you.’

Mabel’s face was one of dismay. ‘Must you really go, mummie?’

‘Yes, darling. Poor Aunt Helen will be in great trouble. You wouldn’t like me not to try and help her, would you?’

‘No.’

‘That’s right. And you will be a brave little woman and not make it hard for me? It will be only for a few days.’

Mabel nodded. Her blue eyes were clouded, and

her mouth was not quite steady, but she bore up gallantly. 'When must you go?' she said.

'Now, at once, darling. Will you come and help mother pack?'

They went off together, and an hour afterwards Mrs. Aylmer walked out on to the rain-beaten verandah in her gray waterproof. She could not easily have got men to transport her luggage at that hour, and she took with her only what her own people could carry,—some bedding rolled up in a waterproof valise, her dressing-case, and a small box. She had already sent off a message to her husband: 'Telegram received. Hope to catch mail train to-morrow morning.'

It was a weary journey. First she had to be jolted down hill for two or three hours in a *jhampán* on men's shoulders. It was dark, and raining hard, and the mountain road was muddy and cut up by the wash of water, and sometimes the men slipped badly. This part of the journey seemed very tedious. It was not made less so by the doubt whether she would be able to get a carriage at the bottom of the hill for the long night drive down to the railway. However, Mrs. Aylmer was determined to get through if possible; and she had telegraphed, and sent a trusty native servant on ahead of her. The carriage was there all right,—a comfortless *dák gári*, like a long box on wheels. In this vehicle she spread her bedding and slept as best she could, the relays of ponies trotting on hour after hour through the rainy night. Early in the morning

she was at the railway station, where she got a cup of tea, and her troubles were over. All that day she spent in the train, and all the next night. In the morning, at a large station where she had got out for some breakfast, she received another telegram: 'Colonel Treveryan died last night. Funeral this afternoon.'

She stood on the noisy platform, thinking of the dead man, and of Helen, her brown eyes soft with pity. 'Poor child, poor child,' she said; 'I wish I could have been in time.'

Mrs. Aylmer arrived in Syntia late on the evening after Colonel Treveryan's funeral, and found awaiting her a note from Mrs. Hunter.

DEAR MRS. AYLMER—I have been with poor Helen since she came this morning, and shall stay with her to-night; but I told her you were coming, and I am sure that if you can go to her instead of me she would like it. She said she hoped you would come and see her to-morrow morning, when you were quite rested. She is bearing up wonderfully.—Yours sincerely,
ALICE HUNTER.

Mrs. Aylmer hesitated whether to go over at once, but she decided that she had better not. She scoffed at the idea of being tired; but Helen might be asleep, and it would be a pity to disturb her. Next morning she drove over after an early breakfast, and found Helen waiting for her. She was rewarded then for her unselfishness in the way such natures are most truly rewarded, by seeing that she had brought real comfort to a grieving heart.

It was arranged that Mrs. Aylmer should take the

place of Mrs. Hunter, who was unfeignedly relieved to get away. She was not an unkind woman, but she did not like sorrow, and she had never been on really intimate terms with Helen. Mrs. Aylmer was to remain in the desolate house until things were settled, and then Helen was to go to her.

It was miserable work breaking up the house, dismissing servants, making out lists of property for sale, sorting and disposing of Colonel Treveryan's effects,—all the bitter dreary labour of such a time. But it was over at last; and when they drove away from the house, Helen, though she was sad enough was conscious of a deep sense of relief.

In the meantime, it had become known that she was engaged to Guy Langley, and Guy had written to his mother to explain the position. All the chivalry in his nature had been stirred by the incidents of the last few days, and he would have stood by Helen now against the world. His letter was full and clear. This time there should be no possibility of mistake. He told Lady Mary exactly what had happened, and appealed to her to say whether, under the circumstances, it was possible for him to withdraw from his engagement, even if he wished it.

Not that I do wish it, mother dear. Please do not misunderstand me for a moment. I know I did not behave well when I was at home, and you had only too much cause for thinking that I did not really care for Helen. But I do care for her from the bottom of my heart, and nothing will ever induce me to give her up now. I promised her father on his

deathbed that I would be true to her, and my honour is pledged ; but even if my honour were not pledged, it would make no difference. I love her more than I can find words to say, and it would be utterly impossible for me to desert her now in her misery and loneliness. I feel sure you will see it as I do, and that you will send me a few lines by next mail to say so. You could not wish me to behave otherwise than I am doing. I know it will be a great disappointment to you, and I am very sorry, but you are too good and loving not to forgive me. If unhappily I have even now failed to convince you, then I have no choice. I must leave the regiment at once, and go into the Indian Staff Corps. In order to be ready, whatever happens, I am sending in an application for it at once. But I feel sure your letter will enable me to withdraw it. Write soon.—Your loving son,

GUY LANGLEY.

Guy wrote in a similar strain to Roland, and he sent in a formal application for the Staff Corps.

These letters were the result of a long talk between Guy and Colonel Aylmer. They came to the conclusion that Guy could not live as a married man in the Thirtieth if his father withdrew his allowance, and that he had better not lose any time in providing against the possibility. After he had joined the Staff Corps on probation, there would still be a year before he need finally cut himself off from his regiment, and in that time anything might happen ; but he had better act at once, and, if necessary, join his new regiment before marrying. The marriage was fixed for Christmas ; in the meantime Helen was to stay with the Aylmers.

Roland's answer was written the day he got Guy's letter, and was just what Guy had expected. The boy

was heart and soul on his side. His mother could not possibly hesitate now, Roland said, whatever she might have thought before. There could not be two opinions about the matter. If Guy had not behaved as he had done, he would not have been fit to speak to. Of course his mother must see it. He wished he were at Wrentham, but he was staying with a college friend for a few days. He sent his love to Helen, and a tender message of sympathy which brought the tears to her eyes. 'He must be a dear boy,' she said; 'give him my best love and thanks.'

Roland's confidence proved to be misplaced. Lady Mary was shaken, and for a moment she was inclined to give in, but then she began to doubt again. After all, was not the whole thing an accident? Guy had been taken by surprise and drawn into a position where everything had combined to work upon his feelings. Whatever he might say about his affection for Helen, his own letter showed that his real feeling was one of reluctance to desert her in her trouble. His promise had been the result of pity, not love. Was it not her duty to save him now that he could not save himself? Besides, he had committed himself to Clara Schneider, poor dear Clara, who really cared for him for himself. He really was behaving shamefully to her. Was it not a duty to keep him from that? Lady Mary welcomed the doubt, and it opened the door to other and less worthy feelings. If she gave in it would be a defeat, and those detestable women in India would

triumph over her. She could not bear that thought. Then came the recollection that she had spoken very confidently to Clara and her mother. They evidently believed in her power. Was she to be shamed in their eyes too? Guy said he would go into the Indian army if they still held out; but even if he meant this now he would not stick to it when he had to face the reality. She knew him well enough. It was a mere threat; and it was a very indefensible and foolish threat too. He ought to know by this time that this was not a line that answered with her. Lady Mary was right there. Guy ought to have seen that the close of his letter was rather illogical and injudicious; but he had overlooked this in his anxiety to remove all doubt. So in the end Lady Mary's heart was hardened. No, she would not give in; so long as there was a chance she would fight it out.

It was in this frame of mind that she went to her husband with Guy's letter. It was a disagreeable interview for both of them. Charles Langley irritated her to begin with by letting fall the remark that it was very much what he had expected when Guy left them. She answered sharply, and stung him into reminding her that he had warned her at the time. Even he was setting up his judgment against hers now. It made her angry, and it made her obstinate, and she pressed her view with redoubled heat. Charles Langley still resisted. He could not see it, he said. It seemed to him that Guy was right, and that they ought to let

him have his own way. Besides, they could not force him to give the girl up. He had told them plainly that he would sooner leave the regiment and stay in India. Lady Mary fought on desperately, and rather unscrupulously, exaggerating Guy's obligations to Clara Schneider, pouring scorn on his protestations, and professing unbounded confidence in the result of continued firmness. Eventually Charles Langley gave in again, but the contest had been much harder this time, and he did not pretend to be convinced. He washed his hands of the thing, and let her have her own way, but he did not conceal his opinion. Perhaps he might not have given in even so, if she had not reminded him that after all they could always change their mind later on if they found Guy really meant what he said.

Lady Mary went away victorious, but she was not happy. For the first time she did not feel certain that she was right. She was conscious that she had stretched her assertions to the verge of unfairness before she could overcome her husband's resistance; and she had an uneasy sense that it might have been better for her if she had not prevailed. However, she was committed now, and her answer to Guy showed no sign of a faltering heart. The act of writing to him worked her up; and perhaps her very doubts made her write more strongly. Besides, it was necessary to strike hard if she was to win. Any appearance of hesitation would be fatal. She told him, therefore, curtly and plainly, that their former decision was unalterable, and

that their opinion was in no way shaken by what he had written. She fully understood his action. It was natural, under the circumstances, that he should be carried away by a feeling of pity, and should imagine it his duty to sacrifice himself. But they could look at the thing dispassionately; and they saw no reason whatever for changing their view of the case. She was even tempted into something like a sneer. 'As to your honour being pledged, I think perhaps the less we say about that the better. It was pledged before you left England.'

So the reality had come upon Guy after all, and he had to make his choice. He had received and refused the offer of the aide-de-camp's place which his mother had tried to get for him. As an aide-de-camp he could not marry. Now the military authorities were ready to transfer him at once to a native cavalry regiment for his year's probation, and if he did not mean to withdraw his application he must go. It was a painful wrench, and for a time he was disposed to try whether he could not manage to live on with the Thirtieth. Helen was distressed at the idea of his leaving it, and he was sorely tempted. Perhaps his people would give in if he were actually married. Dale jumped at the idea. He was miserable at Guy's going, and thought anything better than that. But Guy found Colonel Aylmer dead against him. 'No, no,' he said; 'I advise you to go. You can get back if your people do give in, but your best chance of showing them you are in earnest is to go at

once. It will never do to hang on in the regiment on an off chance when you really can't afford it. I shall be very sorry indeed to lose you, but if I were you I would go.'

And so, in the beginning of November, Guy said good-bye to the Thirtieth. He had not quite abandoned the hope of returning to it some day, and this helped him; but it was very hard. What good fellows they were, and how happy he had been among them; and the men too,—how unfeignedly sorry they were to lose him. Soldiering would be a very different thing when you had not Englishmen to deal with. Well, it was no use thinking about that now.

Guy dined with the Aylmers his last night, and then sat up some time talking to Chimp, who was very depressed. 'Nothing will ever be half so jolly again,' he said; 'I wish we could go shares. It does seem such rot that I should have twice as much as I want, and that you should have to go for want of a few hundreds a year.'

Guy left early next morning, and a number of his friends saw him off. Helen was there, with Mrs. Aylmer and Mrs. Dangerfield, and most of the officers of the Thirtieth. After all, he went off cheerily enough. He had been appointed to Baillie's Horse, which was supposed to be one of the best cavalry regiments in India, and he was to be back in six or seven weeks for his marriage if he could get a few days' leave. If not, Helen was to go to

him. And there was the charm of novelty about it all.

Helen, on the contrary, was in very low spirits. It was all she could do to keep herself from giving way. She could not understand it. Never before had she felt like this, so utterly desolate, and so nerveless and weak. She did control herself, and sent him away with a bright good-bye; but then she had to wait for a minute or two, while Mrs. Aylmer was speaking to St. Orme who had come up to say good morning, and as she stood by herself in her black dress her face and her whole attitude showed such dejection that Mrs. Dangerfield, who was looking at her, was struck and touched by it. The good-natured reprobate came up to Helen and held out her hand. 'It's not for long, Miss Treveryan,' she said gently; 'he will be back very soon.'

Helen coloured with surprise. She did not like Mrs. Dangerfield's ways, and had always avoided her. Now, as she shook hands, she saw in Mrs. Dangerfield's face a look of such honest kindness that she was filled with remorse. 'Thank you,' she said; 'I know it is very foolish of me to be unhappy. It is very good of you to forgive me,' she went on, with a flickering smile. 'I have been feeling so guilty this morning, as if you must all hate me.'

Mrs. Dangerfield laughed. 'I think I did at first, but I don't now; though I always say you have taken the best of the lot.'

Dale drove back to the Thirtieth mess by himself with a very sore heart. When he got there he walked up the steps into the anteroom and called for a servant. There was no one in the room but Denham, who was sitting in an armchair reading a newspaper. Chimp ordered a whisky and soda, and spoke rather sharply. Denham looked up, and Chimp fancied he saw an expression of surprise on his face. 'What the devil has that got to do with you?' he said angrily; 'I suppose I can have a peg before breakfast if I choose.'

It was a thoroughly unprovoked attack. Denham's black eyebrows went up with a slight smile, which doubled Chimp's irritation. 'Certainly, my dear fellow,' he answered quietly; 'a dozen if you like. It has nothing to do with me.'

'Then leave me alone,' Chimp growled out, and he said to himself, 'Curse the brute, I'd like to wring his neck.'

Denham shrugged his shoulders and returned to his paper.

CHAPTER XXVII

A YEAR'S PROBATION

GUY's new regiment was quartered at Sangu, a station on the north-west frontier, and he had a long and weary journey before him. It began with two days and nights in the train. This was not so very bad, as the weather was cool now, but the dust and confinement were irksome. The floor crackled with dust, and the leather cushions were covered with it; and if he took down anything from the net-racks overhead the dust fell into his eyes, and the little washing-room was full of dust, and the water was brown. As Guy went northward, the country became less soft and green, and the climate colder, and the men finer. At night the cold was sharp. Finally, he found himself in a dry, bracing air which was cold even at midday, and the railway stations were full of big black bearded men with broad shoulders and fearless looks. But it was a rough, hard-looking country, the cultivation alternating with stretches of barren land and stony ravines: the trees were fewer and poorer; and instead of the picturesque villages down country, Guy saw nothing

but clusters of flat-roofed, mud-coloured houses which could hardly be distinguished from the sterile soil around them. At the station, where at last he got out of the train, he found a note awaiting him. His new commanding officer, Colonel Graham, had a room ready for him, and had sent him a few lines of welcome and some hints about his horses and his farther journey.

Guy's first inquiry was whether his horses had arrived. He found they had come in the day before. They were standing under a tree behind the railway station and whinnied when they heard his voice. Guy walked up to them; and Remus, whom he had taken over after Colonel Treveryan's death, rubbed his soft muzzle against Guy's shoulder. The *syces* reported that they had borne the journey satisfactorily; and they looked well and comfortable. That was all right. Guy gave instructions to his *syces* for bringing them on, and then had some breakfast at a neighbouring *dák bungalow*, and got into the *tonga*, or curricule, in which he was to finish his journey; his heavy luggage was to follow.

It was a bright, crisp morning, and though the road before him was apparently a very dusty cart track, through a wilderness of stones and sand, he felt cheerful enough as the little ponies went off at a canter under their iron bar. Then followed a long day of jolting and dust. Guy could understand very little of the rough Punjabi spoken by the driver; but the man laughed aloud, like an Englishman, and they were soon

on very good terms. After a time some blue mountains appeared in the distance, and here and there they saw some bright crops, and the people they met were a new type altogether. They were as different from the slim down-countrymen as a Norwegian is from a Greek. Occasionally Guy saw gray or blue eyes, and even brown hair. At last, soon before sunset, when Guy was beginning to get very tired of his seat, the driver pointed with the handle of his short whip to a mass of trees in front, and said, 'Sangu'; and Guy knew that he was approaching his future home. As they came nearer he made out a considerable native town of flat-roofed houses, and caught sight of some white buildings among the trees, and of a church steeple. A few minutes more and they were cantering along a well-kept road by the side of a cavalry parade-ground. There were trees and running water, and smooth roads crossing at right angles, and a pretty little stone church, and a racket-court, and a building that looked like a club, with people playing tennis on a piece of nice grass. Altogether, the little oasis looked very fresh and green and inviting. A few miles to the west were the rugged blue hills beyond our frontier,—the home of the fighting border tribes.

They drove in at a gateway upon which Guy saw a painted board bearing the name, 'Lieutenant-Colonel Graham, Baillie's Horse.' Guy was received as he got out of the *tonga* by a native servant, who told him the Colonel Sahib and the Mem Sahib were out, but had

left word that he should have everything he wanted if he came before they got back from their ride.

He had a wash and something to eat and drink, and then returned to his room to see what his man was doing with his things. Shortly after it had got dark he heard the tramp of hoofs outside, and a deep voice inquiring whether he had come; then there was a rap at his door, and Colonel Graham walked in.

He was a tall, straight, well-built man, with a handsome face which could be nothing but Scotch; there was a kindly though rather satirical smile about his eyes, and his accent was the agreeable accent of a Scotch gentleman. Guy was attracted by his new Colonel from the first. Graham was, in fact, a fine professional soldier of a type not rare in the Indian army; a steady, sensible man, who thoroughly knew his business, and had not a particle of military swagger about him, and yet looked a soldier all over.

After a few words of inquiry he took Guy into the drawing-room and introduced him to Mrs. Graham, who was waiting for them in her riding-habit. She was very small and slight, with a shy manner and a gentle rather plaintive voice; she wore glasses, through which Guy could see a pair of dark-blue eyes. That little short-sighted woman was one of the most daring riders in India; she would mount anything in creation, and her small thin hands seemed to be as strong as they were light.

Guy had a pleasant dinner and evening. He found

the Grahams very kind and friendly, and came to the conclusion that he had fallen on his feet. Before they parted for the night it was agreed that he should ride out with Mrs. Graham next morning and see the regiment on parade. His Colonel could mount him, and would take charge of him when the parade was over.

They did not turn out very early in the cold climate of Sangu, and Guy had a long sleep which did him good; when he got up he felt fresh and ready to begin his new life.

Mrs. Graham rode a thoroughbred Waler mare, as black as jet and very handsome, with wide crimson nostrils and a skin like satin. She was too lively to have suited many riders, but Mrs. Graham seemed perfectly happy, and Guy could not help fancying that the blue eyes were looking at him rather critically through their glasses as he rode off by her side on a charger of the Colonel's.

The first thing that struck him when they reached the parade ground was the smallness of the horses. After the Walers upon which the Thirtieth had been mounted these little country-breds looked very light for their riders, who were big men. 'Yes,' Mrs. Graham said, 'they do look small; but they carry more weight than you would think, and they are suited to our rough country; they are handy, and they can stand the hard ground; the men look bigger than they are too.' Then there were very few

English officers, about half a dozen altogether ; and the whole thing to Guy's unaccustomed eyes seemed irregular and slovenly. The men were not smart, and the drill was very loose ; and without the flutter of lances the regiment looked poor. They were going to be re-armed with lances, but they had not yet received them. Guy could not help feeling intensely disappointed. 'That a crack regiment,' he thought. 'Good heavens ! one troop of the Thirtieth would ride down the whole lot.' Was his life to be spent in that kind of soldiering ? His heart sank at the prospect.

Mrs. Graham guessed his thoughts and laughed. 'You don't think much of them after the Thirtieth,' she said.

Guy answered rather confusedly ; but she soon put him at his ease. 'Oh, you need not mind saying so to me. My husband said you would find it a contrast after your own regiment ; and I thought them a dreadful set of ragamuffins myself when I first saw them. But one's eye gets accustomed to some of the things one dislikes at first, and they really are very fine fellows. I am sure you will get to like them.'

'I have no doubt I shall,' Guy answered. 'I know I am very lucky indeed to get such a favourite regiment.'

Then she told him what the men were,—a squadron of Sikhs, a squadron of frontier Pathans, and a mixed squadron of men from the eastern districts of the Punjab. She seemed to know as much about them

all as if she were serving herself. It was odd to hear a delicate little Englishwoman chatting familiarly about these wild-looking warriors.

As the regiment came off parade the horses were watered at some troughs in front of the lines, and Mrs. Graham said she would go home. Guy was to join the Colonel. 'But I don't like leaving you to ride home alone,' he said.

Mrs. Graham laughed aloud, a happy, bright laugh, like a child's. 'I think Bess and I can take care of ourselves,' she said, with a nod of farewell; and before he could say any more Black Bess broke into her beautiful long canter and was gone.

Guy rode up to the little group of English officers, feeling rather out of place in his mufti, and Graham introduced him. The second in command was a Scotchman too, George MacPherson. He was a broad, thick-set man, with a grave face and a heavy moustache. He did not look as well-bred as Graham, or as pleasant about the eyes. He said 'How d'ye do?' rather gruffly, and did not smile. The others were all cordial enough. Guy liked the look of one particularly, a bright-faced boy of the name of Lawrence, the junior officer of the regiment. The native officers came up when their troops had filed into the lines, and Guy made their acquaintance also. They were fine-looking men, with good manners, especially one Amar Singh, Rissaldar Major, a grand old gentleman whose breast was covered with medals and decorations. Guy could

not understand what was said, and he felt uncomfortable among all these men, to whose language and ways he was an utter stranger; but he reflected that others had had to begin like himself. After a few minutes' talk they went on to 'stables,' and Guy felt more at home. He still thought the horses small and light, but he saw some good blood, and for an hour or more he enjoyed himself very well.

Then came what seemed to him a curious function. Colonel Graham walked over to a building near the quarter guard and took his seat at the top of a long room. His officers, English and Native, sat about him to right and left, while the non-commissioned officers sat on the carpeted floor, or stood with the men at the other end. For a quarter of an hour or so this *darbar* sat and discussed regimental business, and then Graham got up and took Guy away. It was nearly midday, and Guy was getting hungry.

A bath and a late breakfast followed, and then a smoke with the Colonel, after which Guy went off to his own room for an hour or two. In the afternoon, Graham said, there would be the weekly sports, and Guy would find them worth seeing. It was a curious sight. The men came down in their own native clothes looking bigger than ever, the Pathans particularly, with their square shoulders and broad chests and flowing lower garments; every one turned out very well. There were turbans of beautiful delicate colours, and fresh white linen clothing that rustled

bravely in the wind, as the men came galloping down at the peg with their lances high in air; and there was much chaff and laughter and good fellowship. The English officers took their share in it all, and Guy had his first try at a tent-peg. Lawrence lent him a horse, which went as hard and straight as a horse could go. Twice Guy's lance-point passed over the wooden mark and struck the ground beyond it; the third time he got home, and the peg came beautifully away, and swung round in the air with the steel through its centre. '*Shábásh! Shábásh!*' the men said. And Guy thought, 'By Jove, how easy it is! With a little practice, and a horse that will go straight, one ought never to miss.' He found one could miss, nevertheless, many a day afterwards. Then some of them rode at the peg with their sword-points, and there was lime-cutting and shooting on horseback, and Guy enjoyed the whole thing extremely.

When he sat down to write to Helen that night his letter was bright enough. He was resolved to make the best of things, and he found no difficulty in doing so. His first day had been far from disagreeable, and he felt that, after all, the life would not be so very bad.

The next day was Sunday, and Guy did not feel so happy. There was, of course, no church parade, but he went off with Mrs. Graham to the little church he had seen among the trees. There was a very small congregation and no music, and the service depressed

him; he longed to be back in Syntia and to hear Helen's voice again. Well, it would not be many weeks before he heard it.

On the Monday morning he moved over to his new quarters. He was to share a house with Lawrence, as he had done with Dale, until he could get one ready for Helen and himself. In the meantime, he had discovered that Lawrence had been at Eton. His father had lost money, and he had been obliged to take to an Indian career, but Guy and he had been at school together. Though they had a very faint recollection of each other, this was a bond of union at once. 'Do you know,' Guy said, 'I thought directly I saw you that you looked as if you had been at Eton; one can almost always tell.'

The next six weeks passed rapidly enough. Guy had his hands very full, for he had not only to learn his new work, but to spend some hours every day over the native languages. In the intervals he did what he could, with the help of Mrs. Graham, to get ready the little house he had taken. It was very small and very bare, and he could not help feeling that it was a poor home to bring a wife to; but he knew that Helen would not care about that, and there was no other house available. After all, it looked rather pretty when it was finished. Mrs. Graham and he had spent many a pleasant hour over it together. She really seemed to enjoy the work, and was very clever and sensible and good-natured, laughing at him incessantly,

and lecturing and helping him as if he had been her younger brother.

It was the middle of December now, and Guy was quite at home in Sangu. He was beginning to understand the men, though their language was very different from what he had heard before; and he had made friends with all the officers, who evidently liked him. MacPherson was perhaps the only exception; he was inclined to sneer at the British cavalry and all its ways; he regarded them as show soldiers, very fine on parade, but quite helpless and useless on service, and he resented their swagger; then he held very strongly the opinion that 'a young man married is a man that's marred.' He could not find much fault with Guy, who was smart and willing to learn; but he thought him a little too smart in some ways, and he was occasionally rude in his manner. However, one cannot have everything, and though Guy thought MacPherson coarse-bred, the man was a stout, capable soldier, and he did not seem really ill-natured.

Altogether, things were pleasant enough. In another week Guy was to be married. The Colonel had given him ten days at Christmas, and on the morning of the 22nd he was to start for Syntia. His heart had begun to throb very hard at times as he thought of what was before him. Poor fellow! he had many a long month to pass before he got his bride.

His letters from Helen had been regular, but he

had been a little hurt more than once by their seeming short and cold. On the morning of the 20th he received his post as usual. She was not feeling very well, and had nothing to say, so he must excuse a stupid letter. The next morning it was worse. She said she had a touch of fever. 'Nothing serious, so don't worry about it. I shall be all right to-morrow. I only tell you because I promised to tell you everything.' But she was not 'all right to-morrow.' The same evening Guy received a telegram from Mrs. Aylmer. 'Helen has sharp attack of fever. Better await further news before starting. Some postponement necessary.' Guy hesitated. He was longing to go. On the other hand, he knew he could not expect leave again during the winter; and if his marriage had to be postponed, it would be better to put off going now. He gave up his journey, therefore, in bitter disappointment and waited.

Day after day the news became worse. Helen's letters stopped. She was seriously ill now, in very high fever, at times even delirious. At last, one day soon after the beginning of the new year, when he had hoped to be settled in his own house with his bride, a letter came which brought him a heavy blow. The fever was typhoid. Mrs. Aylmer added that Helen had apparently been sickening for weeks past; she had been in very low spirits and unlike herself. They had attributed it to her father's death and Guy's absence, but probably it was the beginning of illness.

'I am very distressed to tell you this,' Mrs. Aylmer wrote; 'but let me beg of you not to come down. You could not do anything, or even see her, and it would be altogether a mistake. You may trust me to take care of her as if she were my own daughter, and if there is any real danger I will send for you at once.'

So Guy stayed in Sangu, trying to do his work and learn his languages, while the girl he loved lay a thousand miles away tossing in pain and delirium. It was a bad attack, and time after time Mrs. Aylmer was on the point of telegraphing for Guy. At last, after weeks of doubt, Helen's strong constitution got the better of the disease, and he received a telegram to say that unless a relapse occurred she was fairly out of danger. A few days later, directly she was able to do so, she wrote to him. It was a poor little pencil note, in a very shaky hand:—'MY DARLING—I am much better. I am so sorry to have behaved like this. Please forgive me.—Ever your own HELEN.' After that the pencil notes were pretty regular, but for some time the writing remained uncertain and feeble.

Throughout these miserable weeks Guy found Lawrence a real comfort to him. It was touching to see how the boy set himself to work to help his new friend, cheerfully giving up his time and his pleasures to lighten the trouble of another. Guy was too much absorbed in his own anxiety to realise fully

at the time how much was being done for him, but he came to understand it later, and to be grateful for it. There are so many good fellows in the world; one finds it out when things go wrong, and nowhere more quickly than in India.

At last, towards the end of February, the letters became more satisfactory. Helen had begun to make real progress. Mrs. Aylmer reported that she was gaining strength daily, and her letters began to show it. There was now little or no fear of a relapse, and Guy could again breathe freely. At the same time Mrs. Aylmer brought home to him a fact of which he had for some weeks past been growing dimly conscious. It was out of the question, the doctors said, that after such an illness Helen could be fit to face a summer in the fearful heat of Sangu. She ought to go to England, or at all events up to the hills, and her marriage must be postponed. Mrs. Aylmer suggested his getting a few days' leave now if possible, and coming down to talk it all over.

Early in March Guy started. It was cold at Sangu, but he found it much warmer as he went southward again into the green country, and at Syntia it was beginning to get hot.

The meeting was a shock to him. Helen seemed more beautiful than ever, but very white and thin. Her eyes looked unnaturally large, and the blue veins showed in her temples and hands, and the brown hair was in short, wavy curls about her head. She

was lying on a couch when he was brought in, but as he came forward she sat up with a cry of delight, and in a moment his arm was under her, and her head on his shoulder. 'Oh, Guy,' she said, after a minute of silent joy, 'don't you hate me for being such a trouble to you? No good ever,—nothing but trouble and worry and unhappiness.'

And he answered: 'My darling, you are all the world to me. Only get well and come to me, and my life will be one long dream of delight.'

Helen made a marvellous advance during the four days that Guy spent in Syntia; she began to laugh and talk, and to get some colour; then he had to go. It had meanwhile been settled that she should remain with the Aylmers. She would go up to Mussooree again almost immediately, and the marriage must be put off for some months. Possibly Guy might be able to get away on leave during the hot weather and come up to her. If not, they must wait till October. It was a long time, but there was no help for it.

So Guy went back to his wild horsemen in that frontier wilderness and set to work again. In some ways it was a trying time. In spite of Lawrence's company he felt lonely and cut off, and the heat was fierce, such as he had never imagined possible. It was difficult to force himself to study those crabbed characters with the thermometer at 110°; however, he stuck to it gallantly, and with success. He soon found that he was getting really interested in his men,

and beginning to understand and take a pride in the traditions of the regiment, and he got on well with the languages. In all respects the 'year of probation' through which he was passing was doing him good.

As the hot weather wore on, it became evident that leave to Mussooree was out of the question. The regiment was unlucky that year; there was some sickness, and they were short of officers. He was in his first year too, and there were other reasons. Before the summer was over it began to be rumoured in the mess-rooms of the Punjab that things were going wrong across the Afghan border. Our relations with the Amir Sher Ali were strained; he was showing signs of an inclination to turn to Russia. Lord Lytton's government was determined to come to a clear understanding about our position; they would stand no nonsense. If the Amir did not fall into line, the beginning of autumn might see us at war. Baillie's Horse might spend their Christmas in Kabul. There had been a long peace — *Vive la guerre!*

Many a long hour of the night, when the fierce sun was down, Guy sat writing to Helen, and the chance of war gave food to his pen. Perhaps his coming to Sangu might be the making of him. The regiments in the north would surely be sent forward, and Baillie's Horse was bound to be one of the first. The Colonel was known to be the best officer of Native Cavalry in India. They could not be left behind. And Helen would be a true soldier's wife, and rejoice to

see him get a chance of winning his spurs. 'It seems strange of me to write like this when war might mean putting off our marriage again, but I know you will understand me. It is not that I do not long for that with all my heart and soul, but I am a soldier.

"I could not love thee, dear, so much
Loved I not honour more."

Helen did not reply enthusiastically. 'If you have to go,' she said, 'I will try to be glad, but I cannot wish for it. To sit here helpless, day after day and month after month, knowing you were in danger, would be very dreadful to me.'

From his mother, meanwhile, Guy had heard nothing. She meant to play the game out to the end. So long as Guy was not actually married there was always hope, and the less she wrote the better. Her mother's heart ached over it all, but she was a brave woman, and she would not give in. Moreover, Guy's refusal of the aide-de-campship had really made her very angry. She thought it so excellent a thing for him, and when she had asked for it his refusal was unpardonable. Roland wrote occasionally; he said his mother was very determined, and would not speak to him on the subject, but that he did not care. Guy was quite right, and she must see it in the end.

Before the autumn Guy had qualified in all respects for the Staff Corps; his term of probation would expire in November; then, unless some unforeseen event occurred, he must take the final step.

The time was coming very near when suddenly all India was thrilled by the news that a Russian embassy had been received in Kabul, and that our ally the Amir had struck us a blow in the face. There was a violent outcry, and a fiery ultimatum was sent to Kabul. A British mission was pushed into the Khyber, and its road was barred by armed Afghans. Then war was declared, and our columns crossed the frontier.

To their intense disappointment Baillie's Horse were not sent forward. It seemed to them impossible, incredible. MacPherson was furious, and extremely rude to all around him; he went about blaspheming in Scotch, and it was not safe to speak to him. Guy ventured to express sympathy, and was roundly abused for his pains. 'You! Precious lot of difference it would make to you. You don't suppose they would let you go on service? It's just because the regiment is half officered with children who don't know their work that we're kept back now. And I have been waiting twenty years for this chance. It's enough to drive one mad.'

It was a short campaign. Our columns pressed into the Afghan hills and struck a few heavy blows, which shattered to pieces the regular army the Amir Sher Ali had created with so much labour. The wretched Amir fled towards the Russians, but found himself repelled. Then, deceived and humbled and heartbroken, he died on his northern border, and all seemed ended.

At last, when things were quiet, and there was no chance of service, Guy Langley and Helen Treveryan were made one. Guy came down to Syntia, and they were married in the little church where they had been so often together. Dale was best man, and Colonel Aylmer gave Helen away. The Thirtieth were in great force; they were determined, St. Orme said, to stand by the poor beggar to the last and help him to die game.

Among all the presents Guy and Helen received, perhaps the most beautiful was a half-hoop of large diamonds sent to Helen by Denham. 'How lovely!' she said, surprised out of her usual composure; 'but what could have made *him* send it? Oh, Guy, I don't like taking it from him!' Guy did not like it either, but he did not see how she could refuse. When she thanked Denham, he smiled and wished her all happiness. 'I'm sure you deserve it,' he said gently, and she could not help looking surprised. There was nothing from Wrentham, of course, but there was a pretty pair of earrings and a letter from her 'loving brother' Roland.

And then they went away together, and Guy Langley understood how wonderful a treasure is a pure girl's love.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SIMLA

GUY LANGLEY and his bride had only been a few weeks in their own house, which Helen declared to be delightful, when Guy received an offer which changed the course of their lives.

His story had become known, and some interest was felt in the handsome young couple. Directly he had finally thrown in his lot with the Indian army, it happened that an opportunity of helping them presented itself. There had been a rush to the front from the headquarters offices, and the absentees could not return until the campaign was formally concluded. Meanwhile, there was some want of men to carry on the work. An old friend of Colonel Treveryan's, who was holding an important post in Simla, thought of Guy for a temporary appointment where he would have a chance of showing his abilities, and he was asked whether he would like it.

There was no prospect of active service, and Guy decided to accept the offer. He felt that it was a great thing to spare Helen the fearful heat of a Sangu

summer, and he knew she would not go to the hills alone. Moreover, it seemed to be a chance of gaining useful experience, and of making himself known at headquarters, and the prospect of a season in Simla was in itself a pleasant one.

Colonel Graham said it was a pity in some ways, but advised him not to refuse. After all, it was only for a few months.

MacPherson snorted. 'H'm! So you're going again, are you? Just as you were beginning to learn something. Precious lot of good you'll be up there. But I daresay you'll know just as much about the service as the rest of them,—set of scribbling clerks. They'll make you an aide-de-camp before they've done, or a C.I.E.,' and he laughed aloud in his scorn.

Then the little house was shut up and left, and before the weather had begun to get hot Guy and Helen started for the hills.

One of their chief pleasures in going up was the prospect of meeting the Aylmers again. Mrs. Aylmer had decided to go to Simla that year, and her husband was coming up to join her later in the season. She had already settled herself when the Langleys started, and with her usual energy she made everything ready for them.

They had asked her to find them a small house. Guy would not hear of living in a hotel. 'I could not stand it,' he said. 'It's our first year; let's have a

good time. I won't have you kicking about in these beastly Indian hotels.'

'I'm afraid it will be very expensive.'

'Never mind; it's only once in a way, and it's only for a short time. We'll economise when we go back to Sangu.'

'But, Guy, those bills you showed me are dreadful. Your tailor's bill alone is nearly a hundred pounds. I did want to get all that clear.'

'Base is the slave that pays,' Guy answered, with a laugh. 'We shall never get on if we fritter away our income on tradesmen's bills. Charity begins at home, and we cannot afford to be generous. And Poole hates having money sent him; he was quite hurt last time I did it. Don't look so solemn, darling. Let's have a good time; we shall only be young once. Besides, I am sure it pays for a man to do things decently; and really, I have never been a bit extravagant.'

Helen sighed. 'Oh, how I wish I had a lot of money,' she said; 'I feel such a burden to you.' But she ceased to resist, and they telegraphed to Mrs. Aylmer to get them a house.

When they arrived at Umballa, where they had to leave the train, they found the place crowded. The yearly move of the Government offices was in full swing, and it was difficult to get a bed or a conveyance. However, they did get on eventually, in a *dāk gāri*, the two of them sitting very uncomfortably

inside, and their necessary luggage and two servants and Rex finding a place on the roof. It was a horrid forty-mile drive. All the ponies were overworked, and some of them jibbed obstinately; and they were lashed and beaten by the native drivers until Helen could not stand it, and Guy was vexed at her for interfering; and the sun was hot, and the dust and the flies dreadful. However, all things have an end, and about sunset they found themselves among the stony spurs at the foot of the Himalayas. Soon afterwards they drove up the main street of Kalka, with much blowing of bugles, and alighted, dusty and cramped, at the door of a hotel.

An Indian hotel is a strange place. They found they could have a little whitewashed bedroom and dressing-room in a low thatched building a few yards from the road. You entered from a verandah by a latched glass door, the panes of which were covered on the inside with thin red *saloo* muslin. The furniture consisted of a drugget, one bare bedstead strung with tape, and two wooden chairs. In the dressing-room was a small table and looking-glass. Travellers were expected to provide their own bedding. Their boxes were deposited in the verandah near their door, and a hotel bearer brought them two candles. Dinner was at seven o'clock in a neighbouring building. It was not luxury, but they were glad to be at rest, and quite prepared to be content with everything.

The water felt pleasantly cold; and after getting rid of the dust of the road they had some food in the little common dining-room, in company with a few other way-worn travellers.

Then Guy went off and made inquiries at the Post-Office. It was all right. His telegram from Sangu had secured them a *tonga* for the next morning. They must start at six o'clock.

They got up before daybreak, and made ready for their drive. It was cool and fresh, and the note of the 'hot-weather bird' sounded pleasantly in the distance. They were young, and had slept well enough, though Helen had been conscious of much bugling and the sound of many carriage-wheels during the night,—fresh arrivals from Umballa, and mails going through.

They could take little luggage with them in the *tonga*, a low two-wheeled cart with a canvas top, just able to seat four, so the bearer was left behind to bring up the boxes on the backs of coolies, and Guy and Helen and old Kesa, the *ayah*, packed themselves into their vehicle, carrying nothing but dressing-bags, a little bedding, and enough clothes to last them over a couple of days. They stowed away Kesa and Rex in front by the driver, a big black-bearded man, with blue spectacles and a bugle. Guy and Helen sat side by side behind. The handy little cart, with its cantering ponies and strong simple harness, was a contrast to the cumbrous 'diligences' of France and Switzer-

land. The whole thing was very English,—all for use, nothing for show.

It was pleasant enough at first as they rattled out of the little street and over the bridge, with much bugling and clanking of the iron curriele bar, and for a time afterwards as they went up and up in ever-increasing cold. They had a good broad road with a rough stone parapet, and the ponies pushed along merrily. The mountain-sides, across which the road wound, were brown with drought, and even the pines looked burnt and poor; but the scenery was on a grand scale, with immense ravines and sudden precipices and fine bold summits. Here and there they saw an eagle soaring over the blue depths. They were only in the lower hills as yet, and the great Himalayan peaks were invisible; but even among the lower hills there were many places where you might have dropped the 'Mighty Helvellyn' head down into a quiet chink, without any one being much the wiser. To Guy it was all novel and striking.

They passed under Dugshai, with its dreary-looking barracks, and stopped for lunch, after four hours' drive, at another bare brown hill, Solun. They were getting tired of it by that time, for the motion of the *tonga* was anything but easy, and sometimes they got a jolt which nearly shook the breath out of them. The dust was bad too, and the incessant rattle of the iron bar gave Helen a headache.

'Half-way,—nearly thirty miles,' Guy said, as he

got out and shook the thick of the dust off him. 'By Jove! what a ghastly place for European troops to be quartered in. I hope Simla is not like this.'

It was a depressing place to look at,—steep hill-sides covered with dry grass and little stiffly-built barracks. They felt better when they had washed their faces and hands in the cold mountain water in a little room that smelt of pinewood, and had eaten some lunch in the dining-room at the end of the verandah; then they packed themselves into their *tonga* again, and the ponies went off at a canter, and Guy smoked. The relief did not last long. The air grew colder and colder in the shade, but the sun was hot; the *tonga* bumped and jangled, and the dust flew over them from the front, and came curling in over the low footboard behind; the sulky bullock-carts and the strings of stupid frightened camels would not get out of the way, in spite of the driver's bugling and abuse. Old Kesa, in front, began to grumble with weariness and disgust: Guy and Helen took to watching for the milestones; and altogether they were heartily sick of it, when at last they crossed the neck that divides Simla from Tara Devi. Simla had been in sight for some time past, and they had had a good look at it when they got down for a few seconds to stretch their cramped legs at one of the four-mile change stations.

Eastward, away to the right, was a dark, round, wooded hill dotted with houses; then a mass of buildings clustering about the top of a steep ridge, and

extending some way down its face; then to the left some smaller hills, also dotted with houses; and two or three miles farther west again two bare conical points, the military station at Jutóg. Simla itself was not pretty, but there were some magnificent valleys to right and left, with patches of terrace cultivation and tiny villages clinging to the steep mountain-sides. The green of the young wheat was very bright, and the fruit trees were in blossom, looking in the distance like puffs of white or pink smoke.

They drove under the cliffs at the back of Tara Devi, where the huge *lammergeyers* were wheeling in the air, and crossed the neck, and then wound in and out round the wooded spurs which jutted from the Simla ridge. It was still early in the afternoon, but they were longing to get to their journey's end, and these windings seemed numberless. At last, as they came jangling round a corner in the midst of a choking cloud of dust, there was a call from a little pathway in the trees above them, and the *tonga* came to a stop. A servant whom they had sent on in advance had come down to watch for them and save them an unnecessary journey to the *tonga terminus*.

They got out of their low seats, feeling very stiff and cramped, on to a road where the dust lay three or four inches deep. Helen, with her gray silk travelling coat and gray veil, did not show it so much, but poor old Kesa was half-smothered with dust, and

very cross, and Guy's moustache and eyebrows were gray, as were the black beard and blue *puggree* of the driver.

They took out their things and climbed up by a stony path, through a wood of pines and rhododendrons, until they came to their own house. This was a tiny one-storied chalet of rubble and pine, roofed with wooden shingles. It consisted of half a dozen small rooms, and was built upon a shelf cut out of the hill-side. At the back it almost touched the perpendicular rock. There was just room to walk round it. In front, to the south, was a wooden verandah four or five feet broad, running the whole length of the house. The site was so narrow that this verandah was supported by posts. There was no garden; not a yard of flat ground anywhere, except in front of the 'hall door' at the eastern end, where the end of the shelf was big enough to turn a horse upon. The kitchen and servants' houses and stables formed two rows of little stone huts, clinging to the face of the slope some way from the house.

The whole thing from a distance of a hundred yards looked like a toy,—a rather pretty toy. The rooms were small, and miserably furnished with a few rickety chairs, tables, and couches. The ceilings consisted of whitewashed cloth, the fireplaces of whitewashed stone and earth. The pine-wood doorways and wainscots sloped, as if the house were going to slide bodily down the hill. There was not a

horizontal line anywhere, and it was a physical impossibility to hang a picture so that it looked straight. This was the house about which they had been so extravagant. For seven months' rent of it they were to pay more than a hundred pounds. There was only one thing to be said; it was clean, and smelt deliciously of pine wood.

Unaccustomed to Himalayan houses, Guy walked through the rooms in silence, but with ever-increasing astonishment and disgust. When he came back to the drawing-room, after a long and unsuccessful attempt to wash the dust out of his eyes, he was looking very gloomy indeed. Helen had got back before him, and was making preparations for some tea. She looked up at his face and then broke into a laugh.

'What is the matter?' she said, with her hand on his arm. 'Are you very disappointed? I think it's a dear little house.'

'I think it's perfectly beastly. I can't imagine how Mrs. Aylmer took such a place. I don't care a rap where I am, but this is really not fit for you to live in.'

'You don't know, Guy. All the hill houses are the same, all the small ones at least; and you will see how comfortable we shall make it with a few cane chairs and hangings and nicknacks; and look here, isn't that worth something?'

She drew him out through the window on to the

verandah. Below them lay a valley, many hundreds of feet in depth and several miles across, bounded by thickly-wooded hills. The rocky stream at the bottom was hidden by overlapping spurs. Towering above the valley, to their left, was the dark rounded form of 'Jakko,' and more to their front, over two long pine-clad ridges, rose a mountain whose broad summit was still white with snow. The afternoon sun fell full upon it, and showed up snow and rock and deep ravine. Then the sky-line of the hills swept round to the right, to the great mass of Tara Devi with its wooded sides and rolling grassy top. To the right of Tara Devi was the neck over which they had come. The picture was framed by the tops and boughs of the near pine trees, which, springing from the hill-side about the house, stood out against the deep blue sky on both sides and against the deeper blue of the valley below. At one point, to the left, a great bough of rhododendron, covered with crimson blossom, broke into the upper blue. A light cool wind came through the wood, with a sound like the distant murmur of the sea, and here and there the pine needles moved and glistened in the sun. All round them was the faint chirp and hum of insects, which, in these great mountains, needed rather the warmth of day than the coolness of nightfall to wake them into life.

Guy stood looking out in silence. Helen had clasped both her hands over his arm and was standing by him. After a few seconds she put her brown head

against his shoulder. 'Isn't that something to be grateful for?'

And he bent and kissed her and said, 'I'm not human. I'm a beast, a vulgar unpardonable beast.'

Then they came in again and had some tea, and started off to reconnoitre. They examined their small estate, and made out their plans, and found their way to the Mall, the main road of Simla, which was just above them. 'I'm not very tidy,' Helen said; but Guy looked at her with admiration in his eyes.

'We shan't meet any one we know, and they would none of them be fit to black your boots, if we did.' She was neat enough in reality. Her gray travelling dress showed little sign of dust, and she had somehow evolved a rather smart hat and jacket.

They walked a little way up the Mall,—a dusty road along the crest of the ridge towards Jakko—and saw a good many men riding ponies, and some ladies in *dandies* and *jhampáns* carried on men's shoulders. Away to the north, beyond another great valley, were some fine mountain masses, and the peaks of the snowy range rose beyond them on the sky-line. Every one seemed extremely cheerful, but at first there was something a little depressing about the bright stillness of the air. Rex did not find it depressing. He came across a monkey, which sat on a tree and chattered at him, and made him very wild and happy.

Mrs. Aylmer had sent word that she would come

over about five o'clock, and they met her as they got back to their own turning.

'There they are,' they heard Mabs say; 'there's the Lieben Longen dog,' and the next moment Rex was covering her with kisses. She repressed him as they came up.

'Isn't it a jolly place?' she said to Guy. 'I like it ever so much better than Mussooree. Only perhaps that's because I've got mummie. It is always horrid without mummie. Unless of course I've got Auntie Helen,' she added politely.

Guy laughed. 'You little humbug,' he said; 'I don't believe you care for Auntie Helen a bit.'

'Yes I do. I care for her very much. Only of course I love my mummie just one little weeny bit the best.'

Mrs. Aylmer sat and chatted for a time, and they watched the sunset flush come up in the eastern sky over the snowy summit of the 'Chor,' and fade into gray. Then Mrs. Aylmer went off.

'The cold comes on so suddenly,' she said, 'as the sun goes down. I must get Mabs in. Don't you two stay out and get a chill.'

They had a pleasant dinner *tête-à-tête* in their tiny dining-room, which looked very cosy with the curtains drawn and a bright wood fire blazing. Then Guy had his cigar in front of it, and they went to bed and slept the sleep of tired young people.

Next day their Simla life began. It was enjoyable

enough. Guy was, of course, raw at his work, but he was clever and had a turn for writing, and he worked hard. Before many days were over he was really interested, and he had made a good impression upon his superiors; his manners and appearance were in his favour. Helen supported him well; her experience in her father's house had been of use to her in many ways, and it had cured her of girlish shyness, or at least of girlish awkwardness. Every one called on the young bride, and most people, most men certainly, went away charmed with her. Before long they received hearty greetings at every step as they rode along the Mall in the evenings; Guy, with his slight, tall figure and easy seat looking very well on his big charger, and Helen looking even better on Sultan, with Rex by her side.

Altogether, the year opened brightly for Guy and his wife. They had everything they wanted. They were young, handsome, healthy, and in love. They had not had time to feel any difficulty about money, or other troubles; the gloss had not begun to wear off. The world seemed to wish them well.

CHAPTER XXIX

SIMLA

THE real 'season' in Simla, the dining and dancing and drumming, did not begin until the Queen's Birthday. By that time the Langleys had settled down to their life and knew every one. Helen had gone round in a jolting *jhampán* duly returning her calls, a hundred or more, in the sun and dust of the summer noontides. Sometimes she rode Sultan, but it was a trouble getting on and off without help, and though she looked very nice in her smart gray helmet with the silk *puggree*, she felt the sun.

On the morning of the Queen's Birthday, Guy went off with all the rest of the world to pay his respects to the Viceroy. It was a curious sight. The Mall was covered with civil and military officers, in full uniform, riding all sorts and conditions of animals. The majority were mounted on ponies, some on ridiculous shambling ponies, all mane and tail. A distinguished warrior, his helmet covered with plumes and his bosom with medals, riding a thirteen-hand split-eared *goont*, with a head like a portmanteau and

a mane like the falls of Niagara, is a sight to move wild laughter in the throat of death. Guy Langley was glad to feel his big charger under him.

It is worse now, they say. When you leave the Viceregal Lodge you see Her Majesty's army being carted away in *jinrikshas*. Imagine an officer commanding a cavalry regiment being taken to a party in a perambulator pushed by four little Hindoos !

There was little room for the crowd in the small uncomfortable Government House where Lord Lytton had to receive his subjects ; but these things are well managed in India, and the *levée* was soon over. The Englishmen went past with every sort of salute, one or two facing the Viceroy fairly and bowing, some making a deep reverence sideways, some nodding hastily over their shoulders, some smiling a familiar smile, some looking as pale and frightened as if they were being led out for execution ; most were in military uniform, some in diplomatic blue and gold, a few in plain evening dress. The natives, who do not share the English horror of ceremonies, wanted more time in order to make their bow with dignity, and were rather hustled in consequence. The most awful hash was made of their names, chiefly because, in spite of requests to the contrary, they would persist in handing up cards covered with a very detailed description of themselves and their condition in life, expressed in very small writing. The officer who had been reading off 'Colonel Green—Colonel Jones—Mr. Brown—

Major Robinson—Captain Smith,’ as fast as he could go, was filled with despair when they handed him one of these terrible conundrums, and he saw a stately gentleman in gold brocade standing motionless before him. If, in the anguish of the moment, he made a hasty and very unsuccessful shot at the answer, was it altogether surprising? But the stately gentleman in gold brocade salaamed sadly, and went his way with a reproachful look. Had he come hundreds of miles for this? How would the Lord Sahib ever recognise him hereafter? The native military officers saluted and presented the hilt of their swords to be touched by the Viceroy, which looked graceful and soldier-like.

After the *levée* was over, office men took advantage of the holiday to go about calling, in spite of uniform. Guy dropped into the Aylmers’. ‘They won’t know me in this get-up,’ he thought, with a pang of regret, though the uniform of Baillie’s Horse was handsome enough.

He walked into the little drawing-room and waited for Mrs. Aylmer, who would be in directly, the servant said. After a minute or two Guy went up to the window, which looked out northwards towards the snowy range. Mabs was sitting near the corner of the verandah with a kitten in her lap, apparently doing nothing. He tapped on the pane, and she looked round and nodded, but turned away again and took no further notice. Guy opened the window and walked out. ‘You little wretch,’ he said, stooping

down and kissing the top of her head ; ‘ why don’t you say good morning ? ’

‘ I did,—at least I bowed.’

‘ Bowed ! you image ! Give me a kiss.’

Mabs complied, but with a grave and preoccupied manner.

‘ Why, what’s the matter, Mabs ? You are not going to drop me, are you ? ’

Mabs hesitated. ‘ I haven’t been very good to-day,’ she said at last, with a look of trouble in her face.

‘ Haven’t you ? ’

‘ Not particularly *extra*. ’

‘ Why, what have you been doing ? ’

‘ I haven’t been nice to Mademoiselle.’

‘ Oh dear, that’s very sad. Tell us all about it.’

‘ Well, do you think it’s fair to have to talk French on holidays ? ’

‘ Certainly not.’

‘ Well, that was it. When Mademoiselle came to breakfast I said, “ Good morning,” and she said, “ *Bonjour*,” and that I ought to talk French. So I said, “ But it’s a holiday.” And she said that didn’t matter, and that I could talk French just as well on holidays as other days. And I said, “ But it’s not a common sort of holiday ; it’s the Queen’s Birthday.” And she said I was talking nonsense. And I said, “ It’s not nonsense. I don’t think it is at all right to

talk French on the Queen's Birthday. I'm sure she would be very vexed indeed if she knew it."'

Guy laughed.

'Well, don't you think she would?'

'Yes, of course; she would probably say, "Off with her head!" like the White Queen in Little Alice. Go on.'

'Well, then, she said, "*Allons, ma chérie.*" And I said, "I'm not sherry; I'm a little girl. Sherry's wine that you have with your soup. I think French must be a silly sort of language not to know the difference between little girls and soup-wine." And then she said, "It is you who are silly." And I said, "No, I'm not."'

Guy interposed for the sake of principle: 'I say, Mabs, that wasn't quite up to your usual form; in fact, I think it *was* a little feeble, besides being rude. Don't you?'

Mabs reflected. 'Yes; I suppose it was, a little. Only . . .'

'Only what? Only you got out the wrong side of your bed this morning, and you did not care what you said so long as you could be aggravating?'

Mabs nodded.

'I see; excellent sentiment. Well, we've all been young. What happened next?'

'Well, then, Mademoiselle said, "Don't contradict; you are very silly." And then she said, "Besides, I didn't say sherry, I said *sherree*," like French people

do, you know, all down inside their throats, kind of. So I said, "Well, then, *sherree*." And then she got very cross, and said I was a beast.'

'Oh come, Mabs!'

'She did. She said, "*Que vous êtes bête*," and that I was rude and she would tell mummie.'

Mabs stopped. 'Well?' Guy said.

'Well, then, mummie came in, and she told her, and, and . . . mummie was vexed with me.'

She looked up at him with a pathetic break in her voice. The blue eyes were quite full now, and the corners of the little mouth drooped and quivered. Guy's principles vanished into thin air. What did it matter to him that she had been naughty and troublesome? 'Poor darling,' he said; 'what a shame. Never mind. Mademoiselle's a horrid old cat, and it was all her fault.'

Mabs was a thorough woman; she had got the sympathy she wanted, now her loyalty rose in arms. 'No,' she said, with her tiny finger up. 'Naughty boy! Mother said it was very rude of me, and I must beg pardon.'

Guy was corrected. 'Oh, did she? Have you done it?'

'Yes. I didn't want to at first, but I have now; and I do so want mummie to come. Do you think she'll come soon?'

'Yes, very soon. But you're sure you did just what she told you?'

‘Yes. I said, “*Mademoiselle, je suis bien fâchée que j’ai été méchante, et je ne serai jamais méchante encore, et je parlerai Français si vous voulez.*”’

‘And what did she say?’

‘Oh, I don’t know; but she’s all right now.’

‘Quite sure?’

‘Yes. Oh, I know what she said. She said she hoped this would be a lesson to me, and that I was to go away because she wanted to write letters.’

‘Then come along, and let us see your garden. You said you’d show it me.’

‘Yes, but I do want to see mummie first. I can’t really enjoy gardens or anything when she is vexed.’

‘But she won’t be vexed now. She’ll be quite satisfied.’

‘Do you really think so? Really and truly? Honour bright?’

‘Yes, honour bright. Come along.’

Mabs deposited the kitten on a flower-stand with a parting kiss and a word of warning. ‘Now, pussy, be a good child, and don’t get into any mischief while I am away; and *mind* you’re not rude to your governess, because that’s not at all lady-like.’ Then she took Guy off and showed him her garden, a little slip of earth with a few nasturtiums in it. After that she led him to a corner of the lawn where there were some shrubs. ‘Inside there’s my visiting place,’ she said. ‘Let’s have some fun; I’ll go in, and you pretend you’ve come to call. Will you?’

‘All right, but how do you get in?’ Guy said, with a rueful look at his uniform.

‘Oh, I’ll show you. It’s awful jolly when you’re inside.’ She dived in under an overhanging branch and disappeared.

‘Come on now,—I’m ready.’

Guy looked at the ground. The grass was quite dry. It could not hurt his clothes much. Next moment his head and shoulders were in Mabs’s drawing-room. There was no room for more of him, as it was only about four feet square. His long legs protruded from the bushes, spurs up.

‘Oh, *how* d’ye do?’ Mabs said; ‘I’m so glad to see you, dear Mrs. Jones. I hope you are quite well again.’

‘Quite well, thank you.’

‘That’s right. No more colds, or fever, or,—or typhoid, or anything?’

‘Well, yes; now I come to think of it, I have had a touch of typhoid two or three times.’

‘Dear, dear, *how* troublesome! You really ought to be more careful of yourself, dear Mrs. Jones, for the sake of those sweet children.’

‘What are you two babies doing there?’ Mrs. Aylmer’s voice said outside, and Mabs jumped up with a cry of delight. Guy backed out of the leafy doorway with a laugh, and Mabs’s sweet face followed him. In a moment she had her arms round her mother’s neck, and was telling her all about Mademoiselle

Dufour. Mrs. Aylmer listened quietly, and then kissed her. 'That's all right, darling. Now we won't talk about it any more.'

When Guy had stayed a few minutes and gone on, Mrs. Aylmer sat in the drawing-room thinking about him. 'I was hard on him,' she said to herself. 'Arthur was right: he has stuck to Helen as well as any one could have done; and a man who is so good to children can't have much the matter with him. And yet, I never feel quite certain of him somehow.'

As the weeks went on, Mrs. Aylmer's vague feeling of doubt recurred and deepened. She had really not much to go upon, but occasionally she met Helen alone, and fancied that the girl seemed a little confused and anxious to explain Guy's absence. Then she saw Guy enjoying himself very heartily at dances and elsewhere, without much apparent reference to his young wife. He seemed to have made very great friends again with Mrs. Dangerfield, who had also come up to see Simla. Mrs. Aylmer did not like it altogether.

There was some slight foundation for her uneasiness. The time had come when Helen must undergo the inevitable process; her husband was beginning to let her see his real self, and occasionally she came upon some stratum of his character which made her uncomfortable. She could not help being troubled by his want of steadiness in religious matters. Sometimes he seemed serious and full of strong feeling; at other

times he was careless and inclined to be flippant. One Sunday he had been looking about him and yawning all the service. Afterwards, when he had mounted and ridden up to her *jhampán*, he said, 'What an infernally long sermon that was. The old beggar bored me so that I very nearly gave him nothing.'

'Oh, Guy! I thought you would like to give to that. It is such a really good thing, and it's for the army.'

'Oh yes. It wasn't having to give that I minded; it was the sermon. As the Frenchman said of the flea, "*Ce n'est pas la piqure, c'est la promenade.*"'

Helen laughed, but she did not like it. The preacher had been so earnest, poor fellow. It seemed unfeeling.

Then Guy had taken to Sunday afternoon tennis. 'You don't mind, do you?' he said, well knowing that she would not like it, and a little uncomfortable at broaching the subject.

'My darling, it isn't my affair,' she answered. 'If you see no harm in it I suppose there is no harm,—for you.'

'But you'll come too? I accepted for you.'

'I would rather not.'

'Oh, do come. I can't leave you all alone. What harm can there be in a game of tennis any more than a walk?'

She gave in and went at once; but she would not

go any more. 'You go, Guy,' she said the second time. 'I would rather not. I don't care about it. Don't ask me, please.'

He tried in vain to change her mind. 'You are sure you don't mind my leaving you?' he asked at last.

And she laughed and answered, 'Don't be so conceited. Do you think I can't get on without you for an hour or two?' But she spent a rather sad afternoon, and the thought came to her: 'I wonder whether he is beginning to get tired of me already?' She drove the thought away, and told herself that men must have exercise and amusement; but it pained her a little.

After that she and Rex used to go for a walk on Sunday, generally round Summer Hill,—a pretty winding road where there were some beautiful views, though the crimson rhododendrons had gone now, and the hill-sides were very brown, and the snows were hidden by the summer haze. After a few Sundays she fancied that people noticed her being alone; then she gave up going out. In the evening Guy used to be very dear and loving, and she forgot her afternoon; but it came again next week.

Then the war was wound up, and officers began returning from the front. Helen was keenly interested in it all. It was a real pleasure to her to listen to stories of the campaign instead of personal gossip about those around her. Guy did not seem to care

very much. He had been keen to go on service; but he was bored by the recital of other men's experiences. 'It's stale now,' he said, 'and we read it all in the papers.' She could not understand him altogether, and again she was conscious of a slight sense of disappointment.

Then at the dances it seemed to her that Guy was not quite so fond of being with her as he used to be. He still said no one danced like her, and seemed to enjoy their waltzes together; but he also evidently enjoyed his waltzes with others, and sitting with them in very remote corners; and occasionally he did not turn up when she was engaged to him. It was quite natural, she argued, and quite right. She would not have it otherwise, and yet somehow, at times, she felt a little out in the cold. But, after all, she had not very much to trouble her. She loved her husband, and believed he loved her, and these things were but crumpled rose-leaves. She would have been very much surprised, and very angry, at any hint that she was not perfectly happy with Guy, who was warm and loving and good to her.

Altogether, the life was very pleasant in many ways. They went out a great deal to dinners and dances; and Helen was young enough and bright enough to enjoy going out when there were not too many nights of it in succession. Occasionally, when Guy could get away, they went to a picnic in the woods. In the evenings they generally rode or played

tennis. The courts were cut out of the wooded hill-sides; and the kites and the great yellow-headed eagles came and looked on from the blue sky above; and if you hit a ball over the wire-netting it probably went down five or six hundred feet through the trees. Then there were the merry *gymkhānas* at Annandale, a grassy basin among the pines. All Simla used to gather there one afternoon a week, and the *jhampāns* and *dandies* were put down on the bank by the cricket pavilion; and there was pony-racing and tent-pegging, and tilting at the ring for the ladies, and all sorts of sport. At sunset it ended, and the crowd went streaming up through the darkening woods to the Mall. There was some good music to be heard too, and there was the little theatre; and altogether, people managed to amuse themselves very well indeed.

Behind all the fun was a great quantity of solid work. Many scores of men who were on duty in Simla, filling the various Government offices civil and military, were, as a rule, not only hardworked but overworked. They began early in the morning and ended late, and had little time for amusement. But there were plenty of idle men on leave, and the fiddling and dancing went merrily on; and the district officers down in the burning plains, and the perspiring merchants in Calcutta and Bombay, imagined that the fiddling and dancing were the whole thing.

As to the people one met, Helen and Guy came to the conclusion that they were very much like their

countrymen elsewhere, which, on the whole, was not surprising.

Mrs. Stewart of the Thirtieth, who was fond of an epigram, said the Simla ladies were all either rowdy or dowdy; but, in fact, the rowdy element was very small indeed. In a society consisting of a few hundred people crowded upon a hill-top, where every one knows every one else, the fast set makes a great noise for its size; but the large majority of the ladies were sensible, well-bred Englishwomen of the usual type. The men were mostly soldiers, and almost all professional men who knew their business. Their conversation was apt to be a little shoppy; but, taking them all round, the average of gentlemanly feeling and intellectual culture was, at least, as high as among the professional classes in England. Being Englishmen, they had, of course, snobs among them, in high positions and in low, and the way of these snobs was to sneer at everything Indian; but such vulgarity was unusual. True snobbishness does not flourish out of England; it droops and dies in the opener air of Greater Britain.

Altogether, though it had its drawbacks, Simla was by no means a disagreeable place of exile, and so Guy Langley and his wife speedily concluded.

CHAPTER XXX

A SIMLA DINNER-PARTY

THE dry weather was over and the rains had set in. The Government of India was not depressed by the change. Their skies were clear. The campaign in Afghanistan had been short, and thoroughly successful. The old Amir was dead ; and the new Amir had seen the folly of further resistance. He had signed a treaty, giving us all we wanted. An English resident was about to be established in Kabul, and the Russian Mission had disappeared into the desert. Our influence in Afghanistan was predominant. The star of England was bright in the Central Asian sky, and the star of Russia looked faint and pale. It had only needed a little boldness. Lord Lytton had stepped forward and struck one determined blow, and all was over. Was this the bugbear that had frightened us for so many years ? The Forward school were triumphant. Here and there a man who knew the Afghans, or had read the history of our empire in the East, said, 'Wait ; we're only beginning.' But the majority scoffed. They had had enough of masterly inactivity.

Difficulties, like Afghans, disappeared if one tackled them boldly. Five hundred men and a couple of mountain guns, properly handled, could go anywhere in Asia ; and for the future we were not going to be afraid of anything or anybody. If the Russians ever troubled us again, then *Vive la guerre ; à Tashkent !*

Still it was raining heavily. Day after day the great gray clouds came rolling through the gap by Tara Devi, or over the ridge from the north, and filled the valleys and swallowed up the hill-tops. It generally cleared in the evening ; and sometimes there were beautiful sunsets, when the snowy range stood out clear and close, above a foreground of wooded hills and deep blue valleys fresh-coloured by the rain ; and to the southward one could see the plains fifty miles away, and the great rivers winding through them ; and around the sinking sun the clouds grouped themselves in gorgeous masses of brown and crimson and gold. On the other hand, it sometimes rained persistently from morning till night, and then it was unpleasant.

One Saturday afternoon Guy Langley had come home early from office. Just before lunch-time there had been a break ; the rain ceased, and away to the westward there was even a little patch of blue sky ; white clouds like carded wool lay in the valleys and rested on the hill-sides ; in places they were drifting slowly upwards as if they meant to rise into the sky and disappear. Guy looked out of his wooden verandah and thought it was going to be fine. He would

go home to lunch, and they would ride round Jakko in the afternoon. The week had been one of hard work. The horses wanted exercise, and so did he. He asked and received leave to go, and walked home. The roads were very wet; and from the wooden drains brown torrents went roaring down the hill-sides through the pines. The walls and the mossy limbs of the oaks and rhododendrons were green with delicate ferns. They would have a jolly ride. On a fine evening nothing could be pleasanter. There was no dust now and no heat-haze; and the view away to the snowy range, over the deep blue *khuds* and the great jagged Shali peaks, was always lovely. They would have a spin down the straight bit at the back, from Sinjowlee village to the convent. His Waler always shied a little at the end, where the road sounded hollow under the black rock. What an awful smash it would be if he ever went over the stone wall there; they might go down hundreds of feet. You could get another good long canter from Chota Simla to the corner by Oakover. That was the best way round Jakko, from north to south. There was very little of the road where you had to walk; the downhill part was short.

Guy reached home without rain, and was received with acclamations. 'Oh, I *am* so glad!' Helen said. 'I was beginning to be afraid you had not been able to get away. I'm longing for a ride, and Sultan was so fresh last time that I could hardly hold him.'

But as they sat at lunch it grew darker, and a gray

veil came across the window. 'Only a cloud drifting up the hill-side,' Guy said.

Then it began to rain, harder and harder, until they could hardly hear each other speak for the noise on the wooden roof.

'Confound the rain. What a nuisance it is! I can't see what I'm eating. It's as bad as a London fog.'

'Never mind. We've got plenty of time. It is sure to clear in the afternoon.'

It did not clear in the afternoon. On the contrary, the clouds settled down more and more heavily, and the sky became one uniform dull gray without a sign of light anywhere, and the gravel outside the porch became a pool.

About four o'clock, having smoked a cigar in the verandah and read the *Pioneer* down to the last advertisement, Guy began to get thoroughly bored. What is more disgusting than a wet afternoon after a hearty lunch and a smoke, when one has arranged to go out and cannot settle down to anything? Helen had left him to his paper, and had gone indoors to write letters. He called to her, and she came out with Rex through the drawing-room window.

'What is it, darling?'

'Isn't this beastly? The only afternoon I can get too. We might have had such a jolly ride.'

'It is very disappointing, but it may clear yet. Only it will have to be quick. We must get in again by half-past six.'

‘Why? we’re not dining out?’

‘Yes; don’t you remember?—with the Ashtons. And it will take me nearly an hour from here. It’s right at the very top of that dreadful hill.’

‘O Lord! that licks everything. It’s sure to rain the whole way there and back; and I can’t stand that woman. She thinks a major-general is a sort of little god, and patronises one in the most disgusting way.’

‘I don’t think she means it really, and you won’t see much of her.’

‘I hope not. What a cursed nuisance it is!’

Helen examined the sky. ‘I really think it is a little lighter now,’ she said. ‘I will go and get my habit on, and if it does clear we can have a cup of tea and set off at once. I will tell them to get the horses ready.’

‘All right.’

Then Guy proceeded to make himself thoroughly miserable by setting his heart upon the rain stopping in time to let him have his ride. What children we are! There is only one thing, working against time, that tries one more than waiting against time.

Guy sat gazing at the sky, and smoking, and looking at his watch, and using bad language, which had no sort of effect. The clouds drifted through the trees, and at times it looked as if it were going to lift, but the rain always came on again. On a fir tree opposite the verandah there were two of the big black hill crows; they kept under shelter close to the trunk,

and occasionally one of them took a little exercise by hopping up or down from one branch to another, round and round the body of the tree. Then they cawed to one another faintly, in a bored, listless kind of way, very much at the back of their throats. Close by, on the very topmost shoot of a deodar, sat a kite defying the rain. Occasionally he shook the water from his feathers. Guy looked at the keen aquiline head, and thought what a fool the kite was to get wet when he might keep dry, and what a good shot it would be for his express. But as this thought struck him the kite came to the conclusion that he could not stand it any longer. He screamed his shrill whistling scream, dived off into the air, and went skimming down the hill-side into the great gulf of cloud. On a wooden railing to the right, also in the rain, some monkeys were sitting. Their tails hung down perpendicularly, and they looked very dejected. The only bright thing to be seen was the roof of a servant's hut, which was made of wood patched with kerosene tins; the tin was shining with wet.

Rex got up and walked deliberately out on to the gravel, and stood in a pool looking round him. He saw the monkeys, but took no notice of them; then he came into the verandah again and threw himself down on the boards with a flump and a deep sigh. It really was sickening!

At half-past five Guy came indoors. They had some tea in the drawing-room, and Helen tried in vain

to make him happier. He sat in an armchair, silent, with his hands crossed at the back of his head. Life was not worth having. At last she got up: 'Well, I must go and dress now. I feel just as if it was the day after to-morrow. Don't sit here and get late, will you?'

'No,—all right.'

When they were ready to start they found Helen's *jhampán* and Guy's pony in the verandah. It was raining still, pouring. Guy mounted in the verandah, the pony fidgeting upon the sounding boards as the waterproof apron was tied round his rider's waist. They got safely out under the low end, and then the *syce* handed Guy an open umbrella, which nearly sent the pony backwards down the *khud* among the pine trees. Helen stowed herself away in her *jhampán* under a square canvas top, with blanket curtains round her. She was fairly well sheltered if the wind was not too strong. Her *jhampánis* went bare-legged, so as not to spoil their shoes, and had blankets fastened over their heads. A native of India always keeps his head dry and warm if possible, even if his body is exposed.

Then the procession started, a *syce* with a lantern walking first.

It is pleasant enough riding out to dinner on a fine evening if you have not got a gray pony who sheds his coat over your black trousers; on a wet evening it is horrid. You cannot get over the ground

fast for fear of splashing yourself with mud, and it is difficult to keep the wet out. So Guy found. First the wind got under his umbrella and nearly blew his hat off; he managed to press it hastily down, but it was most uncomfortable, and he knew it would make a mark across his forehead; then another gust came and wetted his face; he could not get out his handkerchief to wipe it, because he could not hold his reins and his umbrella with one hand for more than an instant, and his handkerchief was in the pocket of his dress-coat; then his apron flew up on the weather-side, and his foot got wet. Unless you wear fishing-stockings, that is only a question of time. Then he felt cold inside one thigh, and was convinced that the rain had got in somehow on to his saddle. All this he could have borne, with the help of a little bad language, but before he had got half-way there came a final sorrow which utterly broke him. In a struggle against the wind at a corner his sleeve was exposed, and he became aware that one of his shirt-cuffs was soaked and softened. That really was too much. How the devil could he sit down to dinner with a cuff like a boiled rag?

When they arrived at Mrs. Ashton's porch they found themselves rather late. Helen's men had slipped about going up the greasy hill. The verandah was full of *jhampāns*, the men sitting huddled against the wall in their wet blankets. All about the porch were standing ponies, with dripping manes and tails.

‘I’m afraid we’re late, Guy,’ Helen said, as she got out of her blanket prison.

‘I don’t care. People have no right to ask you out in such beastly weather.’

Helen was dry, and fairly cheerful; she had been glad to get a little fresh air even in the rain. ‘It is rather inhuman,’ she said with a laugh; ‘but they could hardly know what it was going to be, could they?’ And she went into the ladies’ room to take off her cloak and ‘cloud.’ With Guy in his present humour she felt that a change of company might not be altogether undesirable.

Guy’s ill humour soon gave way. The room was full of people when they came in, and he fancied that their hostess looked them up and down rather haughtily, as if a subaltern and his wife had no business to be the last to arrive. She was just the sort of woman to think that,—a vulgar woman half the age of the General, who had lately married her and brought her out from England. She had not yet realised that in India generals were pretty numerous. Guy’s shirt-cuff was not very bad after all; and when he went in to dinner and searched the name-cards, he found himself placed next to a very pleasant lady with whom he was on the best of terms. ‘This *is* luck,’ he said as he sat down; and she nodded and smiled to him.

Mrs. Hatherley was a pretty woman, with merry eyes, a good substantial figure, and full red underlip. She was always laughing, not to show her rather

irregular white teeth, but because she had a happy heart and could not help it. She dressed well, and lisped rather prettily, and the boys called her 'Kiss me Quick,' which was a shame, but struck one with a certain sense of fitness.

Helen was seated nearly opposite, at a corner of the table. She had been taken in to dinner by a Colonel Thurlow, whom she hardly knew. Guy's board-ship acquaintance, Major Russell, now in the Quartermaster-General's Department, sat on the other side of her.

It was the usual thing,—a dinner of about twenty people, chiefly military or quasi-military. One of the colonels was a judge, and another was a Director of Public Instruction, but they had served in the army. Then there was a Member of Council, and a Government Secretary, and an A.D.C. to give the party tone, and make the young ladies happy. An A.D.C. at a Simla dinner-party is like the dash of liqueur in a claret-cup; without him the thing is not quite perfect.

Mrs. Hatherley's lawful guardian, the Government Secretary, was a man who had been at work since seven in the morning, and was dead-beat. His head ached, and he was only too glad to be neglected. Mrs. Hatherley chaffed him a little in her good-natured way, but she could not get a rise out of him, nothing but a weary smile and a few half-absent words. So she said, 'You've been overworking yourself as usual. I shall leave you in peace till you have had

some dinner,' and she turned to Guy. In a minute or two they were rattling away as hard as they could go, and Mrs. Hatherley's lisp and merry laughter came to Helen's ears. She looked across the table and saw how happy Guy seemed. 'I'm very glad,' she thought. 'He has had such a dull day. I wish I were as bright and amusing as she is.'

A few minutes later she looked up again and caught their eyes fixed upon her. Mrs. Hatherley was laughing as usual at something Guy had said. Helen could not help feeling that it was something about her, and the thought hurt her a little. She was right enough. She had got into conversation with Colonel Thurlow, who was a pessimist of the most exasperating type, and he had been telling her that England was in her *décadence*, and that English troops were now in all ways inferior to Russians.

'I wonder how you can bear to say that,' she had answered warmly. 'If I believed England was going down I should never be happy again.'

The colour had come into her face, and the light into her eyes; and Guy, looking across the table, had understood it all. 'There's my wife on the war-path,' he said to Mrs. Hatherley; 'I bet she'll make the poor old Colonel sit up. I know that expression as well as possible.' He did not add what he thought: 'How handsome she is looking.' Mrs. Hatherley laughed, and it was her laugh that attracted Helen's attention.

Helen glanced at them for an instant with some-

thing like displeasure rising in her face. She tried not to be vexed, but she did not like it. It was perfectly innocent of course, some nonsense of Guy's, but she would have preferred his not making fun of her with other women. However, she only smiled and shook her head slightly, and turned to her right-hand neighbour, who was sitting silent at the bottom of the table, crumbling his bread up and evidently in dream-land. 'I hope you don't hold the same views as Colonel Thurlow does, Major Russell.'

He looked round, with the absent look fading out of his big eyes. A smile came over his face. 'What about, Mrs. Langley?'

'Well, he has been telling me that the Russian troops are better than ours, and that it will be an evil day for us if we have war.'

'What an alarming subject to discuss at dinner!'

'That was my fault. I was asking him about the fighting in Afghanistan. But you don't agree with him, I hope?'

Russell saw that she was speaking seriously, almost anxiously. 'No, I don't. I should be very sorry indeed if I did. I believe our troops are much better than Russians; they would show it if they ever had a chance, as they did in the Crimea.'

'Then you are not afraid of a war with Russia?'

Russell was silent for a few seconds. Then he said: 'A war with Russia would be a big business, and it would mean a stirring time for us all in India.'

The Russian power in Asia seems to me to be in some ways on a sounder basis than our own. Russia is a big nation, advancing gradually by land, and absorbing small Asiatic populations, while we are ruling three hundred millions of men, whom we can never absorb, in a country separated from England by thousands of miles of sea. The Russian position is natural, so to speak, while ours is artificial. Still, if England chooses to put out her strength, we need not be afraid.'

'I wish you would convince Colonel Thurlow of that. It makes my heart sink when I hear Englishmen talking about the *décadence* of England.'

'I don't think Colonel Thurlow means all he says,' Russell answered with a smile. 'He is rather fond of frightening us all.'

Helen turned to the other man, who was listening in silence across the corner of the table.

'I do mean it all,' he said, 'every word of it.' You all laugh now because you have beaten a few thousand half-drilled Afghans, but you will know who was right some day. Our officers know nothing of European warfare, and our troops can't march, and they are useless unless they are very highly fed, which they cannot be in Central Asia; besides, we have hardly enough of them to make up an Army Corps. What is the good of that against a power like Russia? They would be about as useful as Fairshon's army—four-and-twenty men and five-and-thirty pipers.'

Russell looked at Helen. 'I am not going to talk

any more shop, Mrs. Langley. I'm afraid we cannot settle the Central Asian Question over the dinner-table.'

'Which means that I am too frivolous to understand anything about it,' she said rather indignantly. 'That is the way we women are always treated. But I am not going to be put off. Is it true that the British soldier will not fight unless he has quantities of roast beef and beer? I have heard that said before, and I don't believe it.'

'That's a very old story,' Russell answered,—'old even in Shakespeare's time. It's one of the many which the French have invented about us. We answered them at Agincourt and Blenheim, and in the Peninsula, and at Waterloo, and by hunting them out of India and Egypt and America; but they go on saying it, with that sublime disregard for facts which characterises them. Of course, it is true that the British soldier is accustomed to better food than the Russian, but I can see no sort of reason why we should be unable to give it him, even in Central Asia. If we cannot, he will manage without it, as he has done before, and will still be a better fighting man than the Russian is. Surely that was proved in the Crimea, where we used to beat them one to three.'

'The Russian soldier is very different now,' Thurlow said, 'and so, unfortunately, is the child they call the British soldier.'

'Possibly; I don't know. The Duke of Welling-

ton spoke evil of the British soldier seventy years ago, but the British soldier went on beating Napoleon's troops until a French general said our infantry was the best in the world.'

'Well, I only hope you are right. But I know the British soldier cannot march, certainly not on black bread, like the Russian.'

'Marching is a great thing, of course, but it is not everything. The Mahrattas could always outmarch us on their own ground, but there was never much doubt as to the result of any war between Englishmen and Mahrattas. After all, the first thing is fighting-power. The man who has most fighting-power is the most useful soldier, even if the other can march better. And I am not at all sure about the marching even. English troops have done some good marching before now.'

'Not on black bread.'

'I decline to admit the black bread. With our organisation we ought to be able to feed our men decently. The Russian is almost an Asiatic, and has no organisation. That has always been his weak point, and that is where we ought to beat him.'

'I don't agree with you in the least. Our organisation has always broken down, and I never yet heard any one doubt that the Russians could outmarch us; and I am not at all sure about the actual fighting-power. Their troops are men, and ours are boys, or will be. But even supposing our men are as good as

theirs, thirty or forty thousand British troops cannot fight practically unlimited numbers of Russians, and you won't be able to put more than thirty or forty thousand over the border, or to keep up so many. Russia is unlimited in numbers.'

'I don't think Russia is unlimited in numbers. Even if we are fighting without allies in Europe, the nature of the ground, difficulties of supply, and so on, will limit the numbers she can bring to bear. But there again I decline to admit the thirty or forty thousand. Why should we be limited to numbers any more than Russia?'

'Where are you going to get more? The British army does not possess the men to give you, and would not give them if it did. They would be wanted in Europe. Very likely some of our garrison will be taken away from us.'

'It is simply a question of money, I think. If you will pay you can get the men.'

'Untrained recruits.'

'Yes, but they will soon be worth having.'

'Nowadays wars don't last long enough to train raw material. They are over in a few months or weeks.'

'Not in Asia. The circumstances are quite different. Even in Europe they last some time. The French levies gave the Germans a lot of trouble.'

'They did very little in the end. But even supposing your raw recruits were any good, how many do you suppose you could get?'

‘As many as you wanted.’

‘But speaking practically. It is difficult to keep our small army up to strength now. How can you possibly hope to get say double the number?’

‘By doubling the pay.’

‘You would be ruined, and then you would not get them.’

‘I think we should get them if we gave enough. Suppose, for example, that we gave five shillings a day, do you suppose we could not raise as many men as we cared to have?’

‘Perhaps; but that is out of the question. India could not pay them, and England would not if she could. She would not even let India do so; it would spoil her own market.’

‘If England goes to war with Russia, and then will not raise an army or let India raise one, we shall no doubt be in a bad way. We cannot fight Russia without an army. But I think England will realise that fact. As to the expense, the mere pay of troops is not very expensive. Even half a million of men at five shillings a day would be what? Say fifty millions a year. Fifty millions a year for two or three years would not crush England, or even India.’

‘All this seems to be out of the range of practical politics. Such heroic measures are not really possible in the present day.’

‘I don’t believe it. We have done big things before, and we shall do them again when pressed.’

One soon gets accustomed in war time to ideas which in cold blood beforehand would have seemed amazing. We must do big things if we are to stay with the big nations.'

Thurlow smiled rather contemptuously. 'You certainly take a very large view of the question.'

'I do not see why we should despair of the republic. It seems to me that we are greater and stronger than we ever were. If our grandfathers could fight Napoleon, we can surely fight the Czar.'

'Possibly. I confess I never anticipated that you would seriously propose to raise half a million of men in England.'

'We had, I think, something like that number under arms seventy years ago, when we had hardly a third of our present population; and in their civil war the Americans had over a million. They were not then as big a nation as we are now. But I took the number as an extreme case. To repel Russia from India we cannot want nearly so many. I daresay too that Australia and New Zealand would give us some thousands of fine Englishmen at a pinch. We ought to be in close touch with them, lending them officers, and helping them with their military organisation. The English race ought to stand together all over the world.'

'They would not be soldiers.'

'Not highly trained troops perhaps at first, but the best of material. Think of the effect of ten or

twenty thousand white men landing in Calcutta in the middle of a row on the frontier. Every man would be worth his weight in gold. And we have our native army, which you have left out of the account.'

'They will be our greatest danger; and even if they were true to us, can you really suppose they are fit to face Russian troops?'

'I do not believe they will be a danger if we treat them wisely. If they see us fighting strongly and confidently, they will go with us. They know well enough that they would gain nothing by a change of masters. Of course they will fail us if we fail ourselves—small blame to them. As to being fit to face Russians, I think some of them are. The Sikhs and Goorkhas, for instance, faced us well, and with English officers to lead them, why should they not face the Russians? No doubt the supply of real fighting men is limited, but we could get a very considerable number.'

'I don't believe the native army will ever be trustworthy. They have seen the Russians advancing steadily in Central Asia and beating down all opposition, while we have stood still. They naturally think Russia is the stronger power, and that we are afraid of her. So we are.'

'So am not I for one. It always seems to me extraordinary to hear people talk as they do of the Russian doings in Asia. As a matter of fact, Russia

has subdued two or three wretched little *khanates*, whose so-called armies were a rabble without any warlike spirit. She has never had any real fighting to do, nothing to compare with our Sikh or Goorkha or Afghan wars. She has hardly ever had five thousand men in line, very rarely half that. The whole population of Russian Central Asia, even including the Turkomans, whom of course Russia will absorb, is hardly a tenth part of the population of our native states. It is hardly a fiftieth part of the population of India; and it is not a fighting population. The Russian difficulties have, in fact, been geographical and climatic. Of course she has overcome them. It was only a question of time. But we have had infinitely more fighting, and have actually annexed in the last fifty years five or six times as many people as she has.'

'That is not the view taken by the Russians, or in Asia.'

'Perhaps not, but it is a plain fact. I fancy we do not at all realise how much Asiatics think of our own power; but they may exaggerate the power of the Russians, as they do that of China. If so, it is largely our own fault. If we had not shown alarm we should not have been distrusted. In our English way we have never ceased to depreciate ourselves; and our pessimists have prophesied all sorts of evil, until India has perhaps begun to think we are really afraid. If so, it serves us right.'

Thurlow answered rather hotly; and Helen, who

had been listening in silence to the storm she had provoked, thought it time to interpose. 'Well,' she said, 'I feel more grateful to you both than I can say. It's the first time any one has been good enough to enlighten me. You won't mind my saying, Colonel Thurlow, that my sympathies are on the other side?'

'Of course they are; so are mine. It is part of the unpleasantness of trying to face the truth that every one's sympathies are on the other side. We are accused of moral cowardice and want of patriotism and every other evil thing. I only hope we may prove to be mistaken; but I am very much afraid that Shakespeare was prophetic. If we do not mend our ways now, before war comes, we shall "run winking into the mouth of a Russian bear and have our heads crushed like rotten apples."'

The conversation dropped into other channels, and soon afterwards the ladies rose.

When the men came into the drawing-room after their cigarettes and coffee there was some music. One of the ladies played a difficult piece, not very well, and one of the men sang *The Message*. He had a good true voice, and Helen enjoyed it. Directly the song was over she heard Mrs. Hatherley's laugh, and was vexed to see that Guy was again the cause of it. It seemed to her that he ought not to go on the whole evening in this way. It was not nice; there was a certain vulgarity about it. Immediately afterwards she was asked to sing, and she walked to the piano

with a feeling of semi-contemptuous wrath. To do them justice, they were quiet while she was singing, but they began again soon afterwards, and it annoyed her.

Her host came and talked to her, and she fancied he noticed it. He was a very polite but not very interesting old gentleman; and she felt relieved when he was taken away by his wife, who did not like his sitting and talking to good-looking nobodies.

Then Major Russell came and spoke to her again. 'I am quite ashamed of myself,' he said, 'for boring you so at dinner. I am not usually given to lecturing like that.'

'I was not bored. I enjoyed it immensely. I always feel it so hard, almost insulting, that gentlemen will not talk to us about anything but dances and so on. That really bores me.' After a pause she went on: 'I was so glad to hear you speak as you did. It seems to me that men like Colonel Thurlow must do a great deal of harm.'

'Colonel Thurlow is a very good officer; but I think it does harm, particularly by misleading people in England who don't know the facts, and by taking the heart out of the natives.'

'Do you really think our native army will be true to us? It would be a terrible thing if they turned against us.'

'Yes; it is our only real danger. If all India stands shoulder to shoulder we can laugh at the

Russians. I believe the natives will be true to us if we are true to ourselves. Some few are actively disloyal, but not the mass of them. If we begin to falter they will go, of course; but if we show them we mean fighting they will fight too.'

'So my father used to say. But it always seems to me that, if my country were held by foreigners, I would take the first opportunity of getting rid of them.'

'So would I, but you must remember that India is a mere geographical expression. There is really no national feeling in India. The frontier Pathan and the Madras Brahmin have less in common than the German and the Spaniard. If ever such Indian national feeling could be created, it would, I suppose, be a danger; but it does not exist yet.'

'But there must be race feeling surely. For instance, the Sikhs or the Rajputs would rather be independent than subject to us?'

'The Sikhs no doubt would. As to the Rajputs, if you mean the Rajput chiefs, we raised them from the most miserable condition; they were under the heel of the Mahrattas, and were cruelly oppressed. They owe their very existence to us. They know this well enough, and they know also that if our hand were lifted from them they would soon be in trouble again. I think that is the real secret. Most of these races know that it is not a question of being independent, but a question of changing one master for

another. They have been accustomed for centuries to foreign rule ; the Mogul was at first a white man and a foreigner, as the Englishman is. On the whole, I think they are not dissatisfied with us as the supreme power. We hold the balance fairly, we oppress no one, and maintain peace with the strong hand ; and under our rule all India has order and liberty such as it never had before, and never would have again. Whatever may be said in England by the party who think the Englishman abroad is necessarily in the wrong, we have done a grand work in India. A few thousand Englishmen have taken and ruled, and given peace and prosperity to, an empire of two hundred and fifty millions. There is nothing like that in all history ; England will be proud of it some day.'

'I hope she will. Of course, we have done India a great deal of good ; but still somehow, if I were a native, I think I should feel that I would rather get rid of the white man.'

'Yes, if you could be independent ; and no doubt there is some general race feeling of the kind. The native press, for example, certainly seems to be against the white man who created it. But I think the feeling is stronger in the writing classes than in the fighting classes. A soldier loves to be well led. In a war against another white race, I believe the natives will stand by us so long as things are going fairly well—some of them longer.'

‘And you think they are good enough to be of use?’

‘They are not as good fighting men as we are, of course; if they were, we should not be here. But some of them are really good. They fought very well at times against British troops, when they practically had no officers. With the best officers in the world they ought to fight well against Russians.’

‘Do you really think our officers are the best in the world? I’m a soldier’s wife, so you won’t mind my saying it; but some of them seem to me to care so little for soldiering.’

‘Of course that is true; but Englishmen often feel more than they seem to feel, and men develope wonderfully on service. Our officers are a fine set all round, brave and masterful; just the men to lead Asiatics. Altogether, my belief is that our only real danger is in ourselves. Our native army won’t fail us if we are true to ourselves; but if the Englishman in England encourages the native to go against the Englishman in India, our fall is only a question of time. A house divided against itself cannot stand.’

As Russell spoke there was a stir. The great lady of the evening was saying good-night, and the party broke up.

It was still raining a little when they got away, and Helen had to keep her curtains drawn and could not speak to Guy. She felt vexed with him still. He and Mrs. Hatherley had been talking and laughing

till the very end. It really was not nice, or polite to other people.

When Helen reached home, Guy was sitting in an armchair by the drawing-room fire smoking a cigarette; he had trotted on in advance when they got near their house and had changed his coat, and now, with a long tumbler of whisky and soda-water by his side, seemed quite satisfied with himself.

‘Well, Nell,’ he said pleasantly, stretching his hand out to her as she walked up to the fire, ‘you have been going it to-night.’

‘What do you mean?’ she said.

‘Well, the way you were flirting with those two old busters shocked me a good deal.’

‘I think the less you say about that the better. I think you were behaving disgracefully. No, Guy, I am not joking,’ she went on, as he made another laughing advance. ‘I do think so. It wasn’t nice of you, and I didn’t like it at all.’

‘My darling old girl,’ he said, ‘I always flirt when I get a chance; I can’t help it. It is as natural to me as singing is to birds. I don’t mean any harm, bless you. Besides, you in your solemn way are just as bad. It’s only a difference in the manner of doing it.’

‘Guy, you know that is not true. Of course, I like talking to people sometimes, but there is not an atom of flirting in that. I like talking to them simply because I find them interesting.’

Guy whooped with joy. 'So do I, Nell; so do I. That is precisely what I find them, very interesting. Oh, you dear old humbug, it is just the same thing.'

'It is *not* the same thing, Guy, and you know it perfectly well,' she answered hotly.

But Guy only laughed the more. 'Now you're going to be cross and make me miserable,' he said. 'It's the old story—

"Time turns the old days to derision,
Our loves into corpses or wives,
And marriage and death and division
Make barren our lives."'

'Guy!' she said, with a little stamp of her foot. 'Stop—you shall not say those horrid, *dirty* verses to me.'

He looked up at her with a triumphant laugh and mischievous mocking eyes. 'Drawn again, Nell; I thought that would do it.'

Helen stood looking at him, her irritation gradually giving way to a sense of amusement. He seemed so perfectly good-humoured and so entirely impervious to any sense of shame. At last she smiled too, and gave up the attempt. 'He could not look at me with those eyes,' she thought, 'if there were any harm in it.' After all, it was nothing serious. She stepped up to him and put her hand on his shoulder. 'You're a bad boy, Guy, and don't deserve to be forgiven; but I suppose it is no use quarrelling with you.'

‘Not the least,’ he answered ; ‘besides, you couldn’t if you tried.’

She ran her hand through his hair and then stooped and kissed him. ‘Good-night, darling ; I must go to bed. Don’t make me vexed with you ; I do hate it so.’

When she left the room, Guy sat back in his chair, and the laugh slowly died out of his face. He felt that he had been successful in carrying the war into the enemy’s country, and his success amused him. At the same time he was conscious of a slight feeling of self-reproach. ‘Dear old girl,’ he thought, ‘she is as good as gold ; but she really is too particular. It was pure fun. I never said one word to-night that I should have minded her hearing ; at least—I never said a word that had any harm in it.’ But then the thought came to him, ‘Should I like her to behave exactly as I have been doing ?’ And his heart’s answer was quite clear, ‘No, I should not.’ He felt that she was above it, that if she followed his example it would lower her in his eyes. Well, men and women were different. Men had to rub along in the world ; they could not maintain the same ideal standard.

Is it so ? Cannot a man, with the passions of a man, be too proud to lower himself ?

CHAPTER XXXI

WAR

It was the beginning of September, and the rainy season of 1879 was drawing to a close. There had been thunderstorms, and delicious breaks of fine weather when a fresh breeze blew from the northward, from the long line of snowy peaks which glistened against the cloudless sky. A few days more and the rain would be over for good.

Guy Langley was to rejoin his regiment in a month. He was sitting in his office-room on the 5th of September when one of his senior officers walked in. Guy looked up.

‘Very bad news, Langley.’

‘What is the matter?’

‘They say there has been a rising in Kabul, and that the whole of our mission has been massacred.’

‘Good God! Is anything really known, or is it only rumour?’

‘I have not seen the report yet, but I believe there is not much doubt about it. A telegram came early this morning from the frontier.’

‘How horrible,’ Guy said; and he thought of Cavagnari as he had last seen him, a few weeks before, on the tennis-ground at the Foreign Secretary’s house, ‘Innes’s Own.’ Every one was congratulating him on his good luck, and Guy had wished he were going up to Kabul with him.

‘I suppose a force will be sent to Kabul at once?’

‘I don’t know. We shall hear more to-morrow; meanwhile, please say nothing at all about it. I thought I would tell you, as you will probably hear some rumours this evening, but the less said the better.’

‘All right, I won’t say a word.’

When he was alone, Guy sat back in his chair and thought over it all. He felt sorry for the mission, particularly for Hamilton of the Guides, whom he had met; but his regret was overlaid by a sense of excitement. There must be an advance surely, and a march on Kabul. Perhaps his regiment would form part of the force. Heavens! what luck that would be.

For some time he sat thinking, and as he thought his excitement grew stronger. At last he could not stand it. He ascertained that he was no longer wanted, and that no further details were to be got, and then he left his office. He was dining that night with a friend at the Club, and he had arranged to send his things over and dress there. He walked some distance along the Mall beyond the church, and back again; and on his way he met men with the news in their faces, but they did not speak to him about it, and he

said nothing. After dinner, when Guy left the Club to ride home, the story had got about. It was being eagerly discussed, and all sorts of rumours had been added to it. The night was one of general disquiet in Simla, and one of deep distress to those most closely concerned.

As Guy rode home he debated in his mind whether he should tell Helen. Better not perhaps, as he had promised not to say anything; and yet the report was all over the place now. When he reached home it was past twelve, and Helen had gone to bed. She woke up when he came into the room, but he was tired himself, and he decided to let the thing be till morning. He was still asleep when old Kesa knocked at the door and said there was an urgent note for the Sahib. Guy got up and took it, and found that the head of his department wanted him to come over at once, as soon as he could get ready.

‘What is it, Guy?’ Helen asked.

There was no time to go into the story then, and Guy answered briefly: ‘Oh, only a note from Colonel Grant; he wants me to go over at once. Some business to be disposed of before breakfast.’

‘What an odd thing. I hope there is nothing wrong.’

‘Well, I’m afraid there is. There was a report yesterday of trouble beyond the frontier. I will find out, and tell you all about it when I come back.’

‘You’ll be back to breakfast?’

‘Oh yes, I expect so; but if I am not, don’t wait.’

When he had gone Helen did not fall asleep again. She was far from guessing what had happened. In India there is generally trouble beyond the frontier somewhere, and she was accustomed to it. As one of the best of Indian viceroys used to say, the bottom is always dropping out of the bucket. Even Englishmen cannot manage an empire, as large and populous as Europe surrounded by savages, without a certain amount of worry. Helen Langley understood this well enough. Nevertheless, an uneasy feeling had come over her, and she was anxious to know more.

Guy dressed rapidly, while his pony was getting ready. In ten minutes he was cantering over to Colonel Grant's house. He found his chief busy with a number of confidential orders which had to be sent off without delay. There was no doubt about it now. Full details were not known yet; but the Residency had been attacked by revolted Afghan troops, and apparently all the English officers had been killed.

A few hours later it was known that a force under General Roberts was to be pushed forward at once upon Kabul, and that Baillie's Horse was to form part of it. Guy was to rejoin at once. His wish had come to him. What glorious luck! How little he had thought when he entered the Staff Corps what the result would be! He left the office amid the envy and congratulations of less fortunate men, and went off to secure a *tonga* for the next day, Sunday.

Then he thought of Helen. He had not been able

to go home to breakfast, and she knew nothing. Now he must tell her suddenly that in the morning he would be gone. He began to realise that he had a painful task before him. 'Poor darling,' he said to himself; 'she will feel it terribly. It is doubly hard luck for her just now. She will have to face her trial alone when it comes upon her.' Well, the thing must be done. It was no use riding slowly, and trying to imagine ways of softening the blow.

Guy found Helen awaiting him. She heard him ride up to the door, and came out into the verandah to meet him. 'I have been longing for you to come. What is the matter, Guy? The servants have got hold of a story that the Kabul mission have all been murdered, and they are very excited about it. It isn't true?'

'I am afraid it is. We don't know all the details yet; but there seems to be no doubt that there has been a rising, and that the mission has been cut up.'

'Oh, Guy! have none of them escaped?'

'I am afraid it is very unlikely.'

'Oh, how dreadful! Did not the escort fight?'

'Yes, I believe so; but what could seventy men do against thousands?'

'Poor fellows! What horrible treachery. What is going to be done?'

'I came to tell you that, Nell,' Guy answered. He had linked his arm in hers and walked in through the drawing-room window. When they were inside

he turned and faced her. 'You will be brave, I know. A force is to be sent up to Kabul, and we are under orders to go.'

As he spoke a startled look came into her eyes, and he saw her face grow white. For a moment she was silent, then she answered, with the ghost of a smile quivering upon her lips, 'You have got your wish after all. When must you go?'

'To-morrow morning.'

'To-morrow?' she said faintly.

'Yes; I must join as soon as possible.'

She lingered as if waiting for him to say something more, but he did not speak, and she turned quietly away. 'I must go and see about your things at once.'

Her quietness did not seem natural, and it distressed Guy, who put his hand on her shoulder as if to stop her. She did not look at him, but shook her head slightly and went out of the room. He saw that she wished to be alone, and let her go in silence. If they had been married longer they would not have parted then.

Helen walked into her room and knelt down by her bedside. The shock was great, and at first she found it hard to control herself. 'O God, help me!' she was saying. 'Let me not be selfish and make it hard for him. Help me to be brave.' Then courage and strength came to her, and she rose from her knees.

A minute later she walked into the drawing-room with a face on which there was not a trace of grief.

Guy was talking to a servant about his packing.

‘I don’t know what you will want to take, Guy,’ she said; ‘but there are two mule-trunks that we brought up with us. I suppose they are the best things?’

‘Yes; we have to go very light. I shall get everything into them. We are only allowed eighty pounds all told.’

They went away together and turned out his wardrobe on to the floor of his small dressing-room.

In less than an hour all he was going to take was packed. There were a few things he wanted from the town, and he said he must go and get them—some tobacco and a wooden pipe or two, and some revolver cartridges, and some shaving-soap.

Helen laughed. ‘Shaving-soap!’ she said. ‘On a campaign? I expect you will come back with a long beard.’

‘I shan’t have time for that. I don’t suppose it will last more than three or four months altogether.’ He said it to cheer her, and she knew it, and did not answer.

They made out a list of Guy’s wants, and Helen added to it a flask and a portable writing-case, and paper and envelopes and stamps. ‘I am not going to leave you any excuse for not writing,’ she said.

Then they had lunch and went off together to the

town. It was hard for her. Every one they saw congratulated Guy. 'Lucky beggar,' the men said, and the ladies smiled and wished him good-bye, as if he were going away for a week's tour in the mountains. Did they realise what it meant, she thought—that he was going on service, and that he might be killed? However, Helen smiled too, and talked brightly enough; and Guy, half wondering and half understanding, and wholly relieved, seemed, and was, as happy as a school-boy at the beginning of the holidays. Helen stowed away ten pounds of cake-tobacco and three wooden pipes and a quantity of other things in her *jhampán*. 'Ten pounds!' she said when Guy ordered it. 'If you only have eighty pounds of baggage, how are you going to carry ten pounds of tobacco?' But he would not come down.

She walked back by his side, tall and erect and resolute, her face a little flushed with excitement. 'How handsome she looks!' he thought. 'I wish she could come with me. I believe she would do it fast enough if she could.' He was right; she would have gone with a laugh of joy.

On their way they met the Aylmers, and Guy said good-bye to them.

'It is lucky for you that you left us, Langley,' Colonel Aylmer said. 'We are so far away from the frontier that we shall never be sent up, whatever happens.'

Mrs. Aylmer, as they parted, held his hand firmly

for a second, and said 'Good-bye. I will take care of Helen.'

It was still light when they got home; and Guy found an old wine-case and pinned a paper target on it, and had some pistol-practice. He made Helen try too; and they both came to the conclusion that a revolver was a very poor weapon. 'Hanged if I would not rather shy stones,' Guy said, 'like the Guards at Inkerman. But it doesn't matter. I shan't want the beastly thing. I shall have a horse, and can always go home if it gets dangerous. That's the beauty of being a horse-soldier.'

Helen protested at once. 'No, Guy. You mustn't say those things, even in fun. People might think you meant them.'

'My dear old girl, I'm not in fun; contrariwise. As the Neapolitan officers used to say after a stampede, "*Mais mon cher, il s'agissait de la vie.*"'

Helen shook her head. 'Don't, Guy.'

When it got dark they came in and sat in the drawing-room talking; there was little more to do, and Helen was beginning to feel the strain.

After a time the bearer brought in Guy's service sword and Sam Brown belt, and asked him to look at them. There was something wrong in the fastening. 'Put them down,' Guy said; 'I will see directly.'

When it was nearly time to get ready for dinner he got up, and took the sword out of the belt into which the man had stuck it, hindside before.

‘What an ass Mohun is!’ Guy said. ‘I wish he would leave things alone.’

Then a playful fancy struck him. Helen was standing by him and looking on. Guy drew himself up with a salute, after the graceful Indian fashion, and held out the sword for her to touch. She smiled and laid her hand on it, and then, with a sudden movement, bent down and kissed the steel hilt. ‘Bear it with honour,’ she said; and she looked up in his face with eyes that were full of pride and tears. Guy put his arm round her and drew her towards him, but she disengaged herself with a sob; she could not bear any tenderness now.

After dinner Guy and Helen finished all preparations for his start, and then went back to the wood-fire in the drawing-room. He was in good spirits, and she seemed cheery enough. He told her again that the campaign would not last more than a very few months. Probably, the troops who had risen would scatter without fighting; but if they did fight the settlement would be all the quicker. They were a contemptible enemy, as the last campaign had shown. He would be back by Christmas at the latest.

At half-past ten Helen resolutely put an end to the evening. It was hard to leave that room for the last time; but Guy must be up early, and it was necessary for him to get a full night’s rest. He was not long awake. As Helen lay with her head on his arm, still feeling his kisses on her lips, his breathing grew

deep and regular, and he was asleep. She waited a few moments and then gently left him, lest he should move his arm and be disturbed. After a time she too fell asleep, but her slumber was broken and restless. She dreamt he was gone, and started up more than once to find him still lying by her side. At last the gray light of dawn began to steal into the room, and with it came to her a chill miserable consciousness that before the next night he would be far away. How dreadful it would be to wake and find herself alone! She raised herself on her arm and watched him as the light broadened, showing up his straight features and close-cut, wavy hair and long dark lashes. She longed for him to wake and speak to her; but he slept on, and she would not disturb him; the more he could sleep the better. She lay down and waited, looking at the opposite wall. There was a little silvery fish-insect running along the paper just under the white-washed ceiling, and she followed its course foot by foot, as it stopped and went on in jerks.

After a time Kesa came with the tea, and Guy woke up. In little more than an hour the *tonga* would be in the road under the house.

As Guy opened his eyes he realised what was before him; and mingled with the excitement of the prospect came a sense of sorrow, almost of fear. Who could tell what might be coming to them now? At all events they must part, and for an indefinite time. How he had got to love her in those few months, since

she had given herself up to him, a white-souled maiden as innocent as a child! Now she was a woman, and his own.

He lingered as long as he could, and then got up and went to his dressing-room.

Soon afterwards his baggage was in the verandah. Helen's *jhampanis* were to carry it down to the *tonga* road below. As they went off with it Helen came out. There were dark rims under her eyes, and her face was white, but she was quite steady. She sat opposite to him while he ate his breakfast and reminded him of one or two things he had promised to do. He was to telegraph from Umballa, and to write as often as he could; and he was to be good when he was in the *tonga*, and keep on the gauze veil she had made for him. There were so many accidents to people's eyes from flying splinters of stone or iron.

He had finished his breakfast, and they were still sitting at the table, when from the pine-clad hill-side below them came the sound of a bugle and the faint jangle of the iron bar upon the harness. The *tonga* was in the road waiting for him. Guy looked up and saw the sudden anguish in his wife's face.

He took her back into their room, and then she had a moment of weakness. She clung to him, sobbing wildly, with her face in his breast. 'Oh, Guy, Guy! what shall I do without you? What shall I do? What shall I do?'

He kissed her head and stroked it as if she had

been a child. 'Darling, it won't be for long,' he said; 'only a month or two.' But his breast was heaving and he could hardly speak. His agitation quieted her at once.

'What a wretch I am,' she said, raising her head, and controlling herself. 'Never mind me, Guy. I shall be all right directly. God bless you, my darling. You must go now. You will be careful, for my sake?'

'Yes.'

'Good-bye. God bless you and keep you.'

He kissed her passionately, and then he left her. As he passed through the door she fell upon the bed with her face hidden in her arms. She lay so for a few seconds and then sprang up and went to the window. Perhaps she might catch sight of him turning the corner of the path on his way down; she was just in time. As he came to the corner he looked back for an instant, and she saw his face. She called out to him, 'Guy, Guy!' but she was under the shadow of the verandah roof, and he did not see her or hear her. It was all over.

Guy walked down to the road and got into the front seat of the *tonga*, and fastened the veil over his face as he had promised to do. Then the *jhampanis* salaamed, and the driver got in beside Guy, and blew another blast from his bugle, and the ponies jumped off, and they went jangling down the muddy road. Guy's heart was full of love and pity for his wife, but he was glad the parting was behind him.

A few minutes later Helen came out into the south verandah. She had mastered herself and could face the servants now, and she knew that from one point she could see the *tongas* when they came to a piece of road near the gap two or three miles away. It seemed to her that Guy's *tonga* was a long time getting to the place, but it came at last; and she stood leaning against a pillar and watching it going round the corners of the winding road, until it crossed the gap, dwindled almost to nothing, and finally disappeared behind Tara Devi; then she turned with a deep long sigh and went indoors.

How empty the house seemed,—empty and lonely and silent. She could not settle down to anything, and yet she felt that she must find some employment or she should give way altogether. She went into Guy's room and packed up his things, tenderly, as if they were sacred. When this was done she came back into the drawing-room and sat down.

How difficult it was to realise. Twenty-four hours ago she had been perfectly ignorant of what was coming, and now it was all over and he was gone! It seemed like a week since yesterday morning. If every day was to go as slowly as this, how could she bear weeks and months of solitude? How little use she had made of the time she had had. There were so many things she might have said to him. She seemed to have thought of nothing. It had all been so sudden. He had gone without her having time to

think. She had never really said good-bye to him.

About mid-day her first ray of comfort came. Mrs. Aylmer had walked over to see her. Helen was in the verandah again, looking out through the gap towards the plains, and thinking that Guy was still only half-way down to them, almost in sight, if it had not been that the road wound about among the great hills. Mrs. Aylmer remembered what she had gone through when her husband was on service, and she understood what Helen was feeling now; her sympathy was very tender and loving. She stayed until the afternoon, and when she went Helen's heart was less sore. At all events she had one good friend near her; she was not quite alone.

CHAPTER XXXII

ON SERVICE

BEFORE starting Guy Langley had received orders from his commanding officer to join the regiment in the Kurram valley instead of going to Sangu, which was out of his way. The advance was to be from Kurram, because at this point we had already secured a gateway into Afghanistan. The direct route would have been the historic route from Peshawar on Kabul, through the Khyber; but during the first campaign we had forced another entrance through the long wall of the Afghan hills, and this had remained in our hands. It was more convenient now to use this circuitous route, where the physical obstacles were less formidable and our troops already held a forward position, and to open out the direct route at leisure. Guy Langley nevertheless made for Peshawar, whence he was to march down the frontier to Thull, at the mouth of the Kurram valley. Lawrence was to bring on the horse he had left with the regiment. Remus could not be brought from Simla, as there was not time to march him up to the front from the line of rail.

Guy found that there was crowding and excitement everywhere. In the railway carriage with him were three officers of the Ninth Lancers who were rejoining their regiment in the hope that it would be sent to the front. At Jhelum, where he left the hot and dusty railway, it was very difficult to get a conveyance, and he could only do so after more than a day's delay. The road was crowded with officers going northward, and the posting service was completely overdriven.

Guy utilised the time by seeing the place, and writing a long and loving letter to his wife. She seemed very dear to him then.

At Peshawar the crush was greater than ever. In his innocence Guy had hoped to be able to get a good second horse here, a good pony at least, as the town was very large, and on the high road for Kabuli horse-dealers. But Peshawar had been swept clean.

After some hours of search the only four-legged things that he could find were a screaming cream-coloured *tattoo*, under thirteen hands high, and a gaunt chestnut Waler of immense age with protruding ribs and a Roman nose, either of which he could have for one hundred and fifty rupees. He chose the Waler; it would, at all events, be able to carry him till he could join the regiment. It trotted with its feet within an inch of the ground, snorting, its ugly ewe neck bent back, and its ugly head in the air; but it was better than the pink-nosed *tattoo*.

But for private kindness Guy would not have

found a bed. He owed that to the Commissioner, Colonel Waterfield, who came upon him by chance, and immediately took him in and made him comfortable. Many scores of men had reason to bless that hospitable house, and its graceful mistress, during the two years that the war lasted.

After a day's stay in Peshawar, Guy pushed down the frontier to Kohat, forty miles away. For the first half of the distance, up to the Kohat Pass, he had managed to secure a cart which carried him and his servant. At the entrance of the Pass he was to mount his new purchase, which he had sent on in advance the afternoon before.

The start was not promising. Guy found his horse picketed in the open, and walked up to it to make friends. As he did so, he heard a warning shout, and at the same moment the beast came at him open-mouthed, with mad white eyes and gleaming yellow teeth. He jumped hastily aside and it missed him, and then lashed out savagely with its heels. Happily the picket ropes held. 'You devil!' Guy said when he was in safety, and he called up the *syce*, Purai, who had taken service with the horse. 'Why did you tell me yesterday the horse was quite quiet?'

The man put his hands together. 'Sahib, what was I to do? I am a poor man. I will never lie to your honour. He is slightly a *budmāsh*; but he won't bite while I am holding his head.'

‘You idiot! Supposing I want to dismount when you’re not there, or get a fall?’

‘Sahib, I have committed a fault; without doubt this horse is an evil liver. He does not like the *Sahib-lóg*.’

Purai’s calm confidence in his good nature made Guy laugh in spite of himself. ‘Well,’ he thought, ‘I must manage not to get pipped, that’s all.’

With his horse Guy had hoped to find a mule for his baggage, but there were none. Transport was the great want of the advancing force, and mules were being swept up all round. At last, after considerable difficulty, Guy’s servant succeeded in discovering four donkeys of the tiny Indian breed, and upon these his mule-trunks and his servant’s bundles were somehow loaded up; then he mounted his Rosinante and rode off.

It was a funny procession, and must have seemed so to the sullen Afridi clansmen, who stood here and there in the Pass and watched it go by. But Guy cared little so long as he got through, and he pushed on as fast as he could get the laden donkeys to move, laughing to himself at times. It was so different from anything he had ever imagined, so exceedingly unlike the pomp and circumstance of glorious war. Well, that would come.

When they got fairly started, and he found his strange mount had no desire to bite his legs, or throw him, or do anything but stalk along snorting with its

head in the air, his thoughts began to wander. Before long he was dreaming of wonderful combats in which his own was the central figure. Now he was charging at the head of his troop into a dense mass of Afghan infantry, then wheeling in their rear and sweeping through them again, slaying and scattering. Now he was fighting hand to hand with a huge bearded warrior who rose in his stirrups to smite him down, but before the heavy arm could fall Guy's point took him fair in the body, and the long sword passed through him till the hilt clashed on his breast-bone. Now he was out with a small party doing escort to the General. Suddenly, as the great man and his staff stood dismounted watching some movement through their glasses, there was a sound of galloping hoofs, and a body of the enemy's cavalry, which the carelessness of others had allowed to approach, came swooping upon them. There was just time for him to shout a word of warning, and to draw his sword and ride straight at the head of the enemy's horsemen. Then a desperate struggle, and perhaps a dozen wounds, but he had given them time to mount, and support soon came up, and all was glory.

‘What an ass I am!’ he said to himself when he had slain innumerable Afghans, and arrived at a Victoria Cross and the command of a regiment of cavalry. And yet wonderful chances had come to other men. Why not to him? If they did come they should find him ready. By his side was the

sword that his darling had kissed. Please God he would 'bear it with honour.'

But day-dreams, good as they are to shorten a march, will not go on for ever. Guy got tired of killing Afghans after a time. He had killed them in every way they could be killed, and they were lying about in heaps. Then a thunderstorm gathered to the westward, and the wild barren hills around him looked doubly wild under the lowering black clouds. Before long the party had to seek shelter under a mass of rock from the heavy bullet-like rain-drops. 'Look here, Purai,' Guy said to his *syce*, 'catch hold of this very quiet horse of yours, and don't let him eat me. I am going to get off.'

The man came up with a grin, and Guy cautiously dismounted, and got into a comfortable spot. They were detained for half an hour or more. Guy spent it in wondering why we had allowed a rough bit of tribal territory, jutting out between two important military stations, to remain not only independent but even without a good road. He failed, as other men have done, to find a satisfactory reason.

By the time the rain was over the evening was beginning to close in. Then they had a long dark climb to the crest of the Pass. It was a very hot night, almost hotter than the day, and even on horse-back Guy found the perspiration pouring down his face. He held his helmet in his hand to get a little air. At last they reached the summit. Guy did not

know in the least where he was, but the owner of his humble baggage-train pointed out into the darkness, and said, 'Kohat.' As he did so, there was a flash in the plain below, and the sound of a gun. It was ten o'clock.

Guy might have been murdered at any time since sunset if the Pass Afridis had chosen to murder him, and nobody need have been much the wiser. But that is our way in India. Our empire is based on confidence, or, as an American once said, on impudence; but he said it with shining eyes and a good New England grip of the hand.

Guy and his men scrambled down the broken pathway, the animals slipping and floundering among the stones, until at last they were on flat ground. Not long afterwards Guy found himself riding along a good smooth road amid trees and running water, and by midnight he was at rest in the *dāk bungalow*. He had had no food since the morning, and was desperately thirsty, but all he could get was some water in an earthen *serai*, and some bread and a dry morsel of yellow cheese in a tin, which were brought to him by a very sleepy *khansama*. Alas for his visions of iced beer and a good supper! However, with the help of Helen's flask he made himself happy enough, and was soon asleep.

The next four days were spent in impatient idleness, only relieved by the receipt of letters from Helen, and the unfailing hospitality of a frontier station.

Guy had secured a seat in a hill-cart running to Thull, but it was useless to start at once, as his servants and baggage must march, so he resigned himself to the delay. Helen's letters were very bright and plucky; she said she was quite well, and gave him a budget of Simla news. He was not to worry about her, as Mrs. Aylmer was taking great care of her, and she was as happy as possible. But he would be careful for her sake?

At last the day came for a start. Guy was to share his pony-cart with two other officers, who were also going up to join their regiments. One belonged to the Goorkhas, and another to a regiment of Punjab infantry, and both were good fellows.

They started at eight o'clock in the morning. It was supposed to be an eight hours' drive, but the ponies had been worked almost to a standstill; and the road in places was very sandy, and they broke their harness twice. They took it all very cheerfully, chaffing each other and the driver, and at times putting their shoulders to the wheel in earnest after the manner of the thrice-blessed British subaltern; but still they got on slowly. They had been warned that it was unsafe to travel at night, as the road lay along the border and was infested by marauding hillmen; but the sun set and there was no help for it, and they went on through the darkness, keeping their weapons handy. A little after midnight they arrived without adventure at Thull.

There they found the rest-house full to overflowing, and apparently nothing to eat. However, Polden of the Goorkhas went foraging, and was fairly successful. He broke his shin against a chair, and stumbled over a prostrate form which sat up and swore at him with extraordinary readiness and presence of mind ; but he found a pot of marmalade and some Commissariat bread, and they shared this between them, with a little whisky from their flasks and a whiff of tobacco, and then spread their blankets on the mud floor of the verandah and slept.

The next morning they were up very early. They had to get rations for three days, and start their little party off across the frontier. It was a troublesome business. Thull seemed to be the most desolate, disorderly place in creation. Though there were lines of mules picketed in all directions, they were too few, and they were worn out. The Commissariat and Transport officers were overdriven, and nearly broken down with worry and want of sleep. It was physically impossible for them or their animals to do one-half of the work suddenly thrown upon them. Everything seemed to be in confusion, and apparently those got most who helped themselves to what they wanted. Was this always the state of affairs, Guy wondered, on a campaign ? Was this our boasted organisation ? He had yet to learn how rapidly good men could bring order out of chaos. All was settled at last, and in the afternoon, nearly a fortnight after leaving Simla, Guy

Langley found himself riding across the border, bound for Kabul.

There are few things on earth, if any, to come up to the joy of starting on a first campaign, when the head and the heart are young. Behind lies civilisation and its trammels; before is freedom and excitement, and the hope of seeing great deeds, with the chance of distinction. And so, though the little party of Englishmen were riding into a stony wilderness ringed round by barren hills, though the sun was fierce and the pace was slow, for they could not leave their servants and baggage, yet it seemed to Guy Langley that everything was delightful. Before his eyes floated a golden haze—the light that never was on sea or land.

What a jolly march they had! How they laughed and chaffed and told each other the best of stories! And what a pleasant dinner it was that night in the little hut at Mundooree, where the first road-post was stationed. The post consisted of a dozen or so of native troopers, some in bad health, poor fellows, from months of overwork and exposure very patiently borne. They held a square enclosure, encumbered with transport animals, and surrounded by a wall which a boy could have jumped over. One rush by fifty determined enemies would have made an end of the young Englishmen and all about them, but they never thought of that, and the troopers were accustomed to the idea. It was the Sirkar's orders, and they were the servants of the Sirkar. If they were

killed, it could not be helped ; it was their fate. And some people say these men are not faithful and not soldiers.

Next day Guy Langley rode on up the stony valley to another post, a long, hot march. He found that the sun had peeled his face, and his neck was very sore where it was rubbed by the rough upright collar of his brown service coat. No linen now, nothing but flannel shirts and fighting-kit ; but he had a delicious bathe in the pebbly Kurram river, and dined with some officers of the Fifth Punjab Cavalry who were in camp close by. They were very hospitable, and full of good-fellowship.

It was a Mahometan religious festival, and the tribes were seething all round ; so they went to bed fully expecting that the camp would be fired into before morning, but nothing happened. Nothing ever does happen as it ought to happen.

On the third day they marched into Kurram itself, and there Guy rejoined his regiment, which had been halted there for a day or two.

The Chief of the staff, MacGregor, was in Kurram, making arrangements for the advance of the force, and inspecting the transport. It was in a miserable state ; the mules insufficient in number, with many sore backs and bare bones among them. It seemed impossible that they could collect enough animals to go forward without long delay. That treaty in the spring had been a very excellent treaty, but in India

at least it is as well to keep your powder dry, even after very excellent treaties. The lesson has been well learnt now.

How pleasant it was to be with the regiment again; they all seemed so glad to see him, officers and men. MacPherson jeered of course, but even he shook hands as if he meant it. The Colonel was kindness itself, and the native officers and men crowded round him to make their *salaams*; they were all in high spirits, and Lawrence reported them as keen as mustard. The Sikhs particularly were wild to get at the enemy; they had an old race hatred to gratify, and some Sikhs had been killed with Cavagnari.

‘The Singhs mean business,’ Lawrence said, as he and Guy sat in the little tent, seven foot square, which was to hold both of them,—‘the Singhs mean business; we shall see what they are made of now.’

‘If the Afghans give us a chance; I am very much afraid they may scatter without fighting, and leave us to hunt them down all over the country.’

‘O Lord, I hope not! Is that what the swells thought up at Simla?’

‘Well, I don’t know, but I think that was the feeling.’

‘By Jove!’ Lawrence said in a tone of blank dismay. This was depressing intelligence to be brought by a man who had just come from headquarters, and of course knew all the innermost thought

of the Viceroy and Commander-in-Chief, who doubtless knew all the innermost thoughts of the Afghans.

Lawrence soon cheered up when they gathered for dinner round the small mess-table outside the Colonel's tent. It was a very close fit; there was barely room for the seven of them, though they sat close together on cane camp-stools and mule-trunks. And there was no wine of course, only a little whisky and water; soon they would not have that. Nevertheless, they were very happy, and the senior officers laughed at the idea of having no fighting. MacPherson scoffed aloud. 'No fighting! Aha! Once let us get into their confounded country, and if we don't kick the hogs up somehow, I'll eat my hat. The Singhs are just spoiling for a fight.'

Colonel Graham smiled and said, 'I think you'll have fighting enough before you see British territory again. The Simla people said there was going to be no fighting in 1839, but there was just about as much as anybody wanted. You can't go and stamp on a hornet's nest without bringing some of them about your ears. Besides, the Russians say they are coming with twenty thousand men to turn us out. If they come, there'll be wigs on the green.'

'No, are they really, Colonel?' Guy said. 'I haven't seen any news for days. What glorious fun it would be!'

The idea was hailed with acclamation. What did it matter that we were pushing forward with only five

or six thousand men, and not transport enough for half that number? It was not for them to count the odds; were they not soldiers? English luck and English pluck would pull us through somehow.

After dinner, the little party sat and smoked; and then had some more whisky and water, and turned into their little tents and slept. How jolly it all was!

Next day they marched to the foot of the Peiwar ridge, where the fight had been in the winter. It closed up the end of the Kurram valley like a wall. When they got near, they saw it was a very steep pine-covered hill-side with a zigzag road going up it. To the left were some towering cliffs, upon which, when we attacked them, the Afghans had planted guns. Dugald Dalgetty could have told them that guns would be useless up there—‘perched like to scarts, or seagulls, on the top of a rock;’ but probably they had never heard of that immortal soldier. The present generation, of Afghans, do not read Walter Scott.

Upon the summit of the ridge was the cantonment which our troops had held all the year. It was a dreary, dusty, cold place,—a clearing in a pine wood, with some log huts plastered with mud. Some bearded officers were walking about it in sheepskin coats, *posteens*, embroidered with yellow silk and faced with astrakhan,—a picturesque dress.

The climb was very long and severe, and took it out of the horses; but, once up, the view back over the Kurram valley was very fine. The barrenness of

the plain was mellowed by distance, and the hills formed a fine amphitheatre. Guy stood and looked at it, and then turned to his squadron commander, Bradford: 'What a place for troops to let themselves be kicked out of! It seems an impossibility that any force could take it.'

It was an impossibility, but British troops well led can do impossibilities against Asiatics. Englishmen in India have long recognised and acted upon that principle, or we should not be in India now. It is a principle which has led us into some disasters; and it would doubtless be condemned by the philosophic Radical, who thinks one man is quite as good as another, in fact rather better; but it has been the foundation of our empire.

From the Peiwar Kotal Baillie's Horse pushed on by a good newly-made road through the mountains to Ali Khel, where General Roberts had his headquarters. Guy had seen him at Simla, and at once recognised the cheery face, and neat, well-dressed figure, as little 'Bobs' rode up to the regiment and spoke a few words of welcome. He knew the value of such timely acts of courtesy, and never omitted them; they did much to help his growing popularity.

But the cavalry were wanted on the other side of the range, so they pushed rapidly forward through the wooded defiles. Near Ali Khel Baillie's Horse met on the road a deputation which had come from the Amir. There were three or

four high officials, bearded men with Jewish features, dressed in tall astrakhan caps and voluminous cloth coats, with gold braid upon them; and some very villainous-looking attendants, with dirty arms and faces and insolent expressions. The headman spoke as he passed them, and they saw that he had no front teeth.

‘What a horrid set of brutes!’ Guy said to Lawrence as they stood and watched the party go by. ‘I don’t think we need be much afraid of any number of them.’

‘I only hope they will give us a chance of getting at them; how the men would enjoy it! Look at them now.’

The men certainly did not look friendly. With their neat workmanlike uniforms and well-kept arms they formed a very pleasing contrast to the savage ruffians they were gazing at; but it would have been hard to say which scowled hardest, Afghan or Indian. Lawrence was right; the Singhs evidently meant business.

The next few days were full of interest. The defile was in parts rough and difficult, and the tribes were out; small parties were always in danger of attack, and some were cut up. It was necessary to move with caution.

One night some shots were fired into the camp. Guy Langley was awake at the time and talking to Lawrence; they had just turned in. Suddenly there

was a shot, followed by several more, apparently at some distance, and then the two young men heard for the first time a sound with which they were destined to become well acquainted, the ping of a hostile bullet. 'By George, it's an attack,' Guy said; and they jumped out of bed in some excitement. But the affair was soon over. The Colonel took it very coolly, and the enemy did not wait to be punished. In half an hour all was quiet again; no one had been hit.

In a day or two Baillie's Horse saw open country before them; and once out of the treacherous mountains they knew they could give a good account of themselves.

Some days before the end of the month, which had opened so peacefully among the Simla pines, Guy Langley rode down with his squadron of Sikhs on to Afghan soil. Only fifty miles away lay the guilty city. It was tantalising for the cavalry to feel that they were so near, and that they could do nothing. They were pushed forward a few miles into the plain; but until the whole of the small force was collected, there could be no real advance; and the transport difficulties were heartbreaking. It is a miserable thing, that feeling that you are crippled for want of mules and camels; but an army without transport is like a fleet without steam or sails. In England these matters have, of course, been thoroughly worked out. If we put down our two army corps in any foreign country now they

would not be put down like the army in the Crimea, without means of motion.

While they were waiting for the advance Guy Langley and his brother officers had plenty of time to realise the difficulties of the enterprise upon which they were engaged. Behind them lay a long line of communication, flanked by rough fighting tribes, who could strike in upon it at almost any point, while everywhere the line was very weakly held. Indeed, our attempt to hold it as we did savoured of 'impudence.' These tribes numbered their fighting men by scores of thousands. In front lay a hostile country, and at Kabul, when they got there with their scanty transport, they would find awaiting them an enemy whose numbers it was impossible to guess. Some accounts put it at twenty regiments of Regulars, or about twelve thousand men, besides the tribes; and the tribes were the real danger. They might easily have fifty thousand men on their hands.

During this time Guy got his first lesson in practical soldiering. If it was tantalising it was yet pleasant enough. The country looked dry and bare in most parts, but there were villages here and there—that is to say, square mud forts with dwelling-places inside them, and running water and some fine trees. No one offered resistance. There were reports of gatherings to right and left and in front; and occasionally a few men could be seen on the sky-line of the hills, but they never met an enemy. The villagers sat at the

doorways of their forts and pretended to be friendly ; and the cavalry managed to get some supplies. Guy was in the saddle all day on one duty or another ; but the weather was good, and the nights clear and warm with a bright moon. Altogether, he was quite happy, except for the longing to get on and avenge the slaughtered Mission.

Meanwhile, the Amir himself had come in to our camp. He had fled from Kabul under pretence of taking a walk, and had thrown himself on our mercy. We professed to be advancing to restore his authority overthrown by rebels. What more natural than that he should join us ? Yet he did not seem comfortable somehow, perhaps because our people, when they had got him, were a little too pointed in their attentions. There was something rather grim about that guard of Highlanders with their fixed bayonets.

Guy saw him and was not favourably impressed. As a boy Yakub Khan had been the Hotspur of the Afghans, and his reputation had stood very high. Now he was a rather good-looking man, with a short black beard, and a gentle plaintive voice, and his manner was not undignified, but the forehead retreated in the most abnormal way under the round Astrakhan cap, and there was a shifty, furtive look about the eyes. Guy noticed it as he rode in with the Amir on escort duty, and wondered whether he was a guilty man,—guilty of the treacherous massacre of our Mission—or merely a weak one. There seemed to be only one opinion in the

camp. Almost every British officer with the force would have voted for hanging His Highness as high as Haman. Men's blood was excited to boiling pitch by stories of the massacre, and they were not in a condition to judge dispassionately.

But the forms of friendship were duly observed. The General in command paid a public visit to His Highness, and His Highness paid a return visit to the General in command, and they were exceedingly polite to one another; and in front of the tent was the guard of honour, with the sun on their bayonets; and all around the bronzed, half-contemptuous faces of English officers in their brown fighting-clothes.

It was more than a month after the fall of the Residency when the first measure of retribution was dealt out. On the 2nd of October the little force advanced from the foot of the mountain down the long valley that led to Kabul. The march was slow and toilsome for want of transport; but our people were cheered by the news that the enemy meant to fight. Soon after the start, a *sowar* of Baillie's Horse, himself an Afghan who had been on leave, came into camp and reported himself. MacPherson was speaking to Guy at the moment, but he knew the man at once. 'Ah, Jelal-ud-din!' he said, 'I have been expecting you. Why did you not join before?'

The man gave some explanation, and MacPherson asked him whether the rebels meant to stand.

'Yes, Sahib.'

'Are you certain?'

‘Yes, Sahib; they are coming out to meet you, and say they will kill every man in the force.’

‘*Shábásh!* But they will only talk big, and run away when we come.’

‘No, Sahib; they will fight. There are thousands of them who have not seen the Sirkar’s troops, or eaten a defeat. They mean to fight.’

MacPherson’s face grew brighter and brighter as the man’s confident tone and detailed assertions brought conviction home to him, and at last he was fairly beaming with happiness. All that evening he was so pleasant and jolly that his brother officers hardly knew him. They were just as much delighted themselves, each in his way. It really was coming at last. They would see some real fighting, perhaps a big battle and a storm of Kabul. Good Lord, what luck to be in the force! So they marched on happily until the 5th, still further cheered by a little attack on their rear-guard which, however, fizzled out rapidly like a bad squib.

Then it came. They were at the end of the valley now, with a barrier of stony hills in their front; behind that barrier lay Kabul. There was a narrow gap, through which the Logar river and the road ran into the Kabul plain. If the Afghans were going to make a stand that was their chance, to hold the range and the gap.

Before daybreak on the 6th Guy Langley’s squadron was in the saddle, and had begun to push

out towards the hills. The enemy was not to be seen the evening before. Would they be there now? As day broke the question was answered. There they were in strength all along the sky-line, their banners planted and their disorderly swarms covering the hill-tops, right in our path. Hurrah! they meant to meet us fairly. There would be real business now.

It was a pretty fight; but the cavalry had little to do, and Baillie's Horse got no chance of distinguishing themselves. They stood and watched from the open ground below while the infantry went up the heights, forced back the enemy, took their guns, and eventually drove them from all their positions. MacPherson was growling savagely at the inaction to which the cavalry were condemned. 'The hogs will all get away,' he said. 'They can't cut them up without cavalry. Why the devil don't they send us forward? It is enough to drive one mad to see the whole thing chucked away like this.' But still the order did not come, and still MacPherson swore and chafed in impotent wrath. His feeling was the general feeling of the regiment, and their impatience spoilt the day for them. Still it was a day of excitement and interest.

The next morning the cavalry were pushed forward. The gap was in our hands now, and our horsemen streamed through it and out upon the plain beyond. They saw before them a fine open valley, with rich cultivation in parts; and then, as they rode on, away

to their left under the range of hills they caught sight of the mud-coloured buildings of Kabul, topped by the lofty walls and citadel of the Bala Hissar. At last! It was not quite five weeks since the massacre.

The cavalry reconnoitred the plain, and got within two or three hundred yards of the walls. As they rode back to camp in the afternoon, old Gulab Singh, a native officer of Guy's squadron, said to him, 'Sahib, this is a great day for us Sikhs. By the fortune of the Sirkar we have come to Kabul. The Afghans used to come to the Punjab. *Shábásh! shábásh!* To-morrow, by the grace of God, we will loot the city.'

Guy laughed. 'I hope we may,' he said; 'but we are not in yet.'

'We shall be to-morrow, Sahib. These people are nothing.' Gulab Singh was a fine old man, who remembered the days when the Khyber hills were a terror to the Sikhs. He was happy now; the tables were fairly turned.

Next day the cavalry were out again, and this time they got farther. They worked right round Kabul by the eastward, and came upon the Amir's great cantonment of Sherpur, which they entered unopposed. It was deserted, and on the flat open ground inside were over seventy Afghan guns. As the cavalry occupied the place, and congratulated themselves on their capture, they saw something which gave them still greater pleasure. The steep stony hills, a mile away to the north of Kabul, were seen to be crowded

with Afghans ; and it was soon ascertained that there were some thousands of them, with several guns. Hurrah ! they meant fighting again. After all, there might be a storm of Kabul.

The cavalry pushed on, officers and men in high spirits, and rode right round the enemy's position by the north. In the afternoon Guy's squadron was out to the west of it, and there were detachments on all sides. If our infantry could only come up before night-fall we should account for every man on the hill, in spite of all their guns and banners and rough stone walls. Our Mission would be avenged then. These were the very men who had been foremost in the massacre ; they should be slain where they stood or speared as they ran, and not one should be left to tell the tale.

Alas ! the infantry came up too late. Old Gulab Singh chafed as hotly as MacPherson had done two days before, but still the attack was not delivered, and when the darkness fell there had been nothing but some artillery fire.

When the day broke again the enemy had disappeared. Not a man was to be seen on the rocky heights. The chance had been lost, and it would never recur.

Our weary horsemen started off in pursuit, and all day long they rode without food or rest, until in the evening the horses were dropping and dying by the roadside. But they never saw the enemy.

When Guy Langley dismounted that night he could scarcely stand for fatigue. Those three days had been cruel work for men and horses; and they had nothing to show for it.

So Kabul fell without a second fight, much to the disappointment of the troops. Perhaps the cavalry were more disappointed than any, for they had not had one real innings, and they were even jeered at for letting the enemy get away. MacPherson's language was indescribable, and the others were nearly as bad. Only the Colonel said, 'It's all right; you will have plenty of chances yet. Don't fash yourselves.' Well, at all events, it was something to be where they were.

On the 12th of October, six weeks after the massacre of our Embassy, the English General made his triumphal entry into the Bala Hissar. The road from our camp on the eastern heights was lined with troops; and as Guy Langley sat on his horse, in the midday sun, and saw the now well-known face of our victorious leader go slowly past, his heart swelled with the pride of the sword, and with joy that he was one of the little force that had taken Kabul. Henceforth, nothing could rob him of that. It was a dashing exploit,—rash perhaps—to push on six thousand men without the possibility of support into the heart of a hostile country, straight at a populous capital held by a superior force. Defeat meant annihilation, for it would at once have brought upon us an innumerable gathering of tribesmen.

Happily in the East a bold stroke generally succeeds, and when the clans came together they were too late to dislodge us.

As the General and his staff rode slowly through the long line of troops, it was remarked that the Amir was not of the party. His son rode by the General's side, but the ruler whose authority we had come to re-establish was not to be seen. Then it began to be rumoured that Yakub Khan was Amir no longer. He had been unable to endure the humiliation of entering his capital in the train of a foreign conqueror, and that morning he had walked almost alone up to the English camp and tendered his abdication. Now, while the guns pealed and the citadel of Kabul glittered with English bayonets, and the faithless nobility of Afghanistan gathered to do homage to the English General, the Amir lay crouched in a corner of his tent, his eyes red and swollen with weeping, a broken, dishonoured man, who could not look in the face either his rebellious countrymen or his English friends. That morning his capital was placed under martial law, his ministers were arrested and deprived of power, and the English General assumed the government of the country.

Of all these matters Guy Langley knew little or nothing, but his heart was hot against the miserable Amir and all the treacherous Afghan nation. When the parade was over, and the regiment returned to camp, he managed to get away with Lawrence, and the two of them rode over to the Residency. As they

reached the entrance they overtook Major Russell, who had come up with the force in a staff appointment. He shook hands with Guy. 'I am glad to see you here,' he said. 'This is better than sitting in an office in Simla.' Guy assented heartily, and they went on together to see the place where the last desperate fight had been.

It was a perfectly hopeless position. The Residency buildings lay under the wall of the upper citadel, from which they were completely commanded, almost within pistol-shot. They were also weak in themselves, and closely surrounded, except on one side, by other buildings which gave good cover to the swarming enemy. Retreat was out of the question. On one side the Residency looked out upon the open country, for it formed part of the outer wall of the lower citadel; but if our people could have got down the wall and scarp and across the moat, they would have been immediately surrounded in the plain, where there was no sort of cover. In other directions the only outlets were by narrow lanes between high mud walls; and, moreover, they had no place of refuge. In this miserable trap the four English officers and their little escort of seventy-five men had fought on desperately, hour after hour, against the ever-increasing numbers of their savage enemy.

Guy Langley stood on the flat roof of the murdered envoy's quarters and looked up at the frowning citadel. Below him to his left was the moat, and the open

country towards India. With what passionate longing the doomed men must have looked out over that smiling plain! To Guy's right was the courtyard of the Residency. The buildings which formed its sides had been partially destroyed by fire, and the walls which still remained were thickly pitted with bullet-marks. In one of the ground-floor rooms of the house upon which he stood, a search party had placed some objects found in the ruins,—a few books and charred pieces of books, and human bones. At the foot of the wall above the moat was a great pit, into which, not six weeks before, the Afghans had thrown the bodies of the slaughtered escort. There, on the bullet-marked roof, with the relics of the fight all round him, Guy Langley and Lawrence heard the story told by a Mahometan who had himself escaped from the massacre.

It was a story that stirred their hearts with mingled pride and sorrow. The man did not know how Cavagnari himself had died, but he spoke warmly of the death of young Hamilton, who had charged out time after time at the head of a few of his men to drive back the swarming enemy, and had fallen at last, covered with wounds, upon the gun he had taken. 'All the Afghans talked of him,' the man said; 'they talk of him still. They say he was *shaitán*, a devil.'

Guy and his companions were silent for a time, then Russell said, 'Thank God they died hard, like Englishmen.' Lawrence said nothing, but he drew

his breath sharply, and Guy looked at him and saw that his teeth were set and his boyish face was working.

Then Russell asked how it all ended, who were the last left fighting.

‘I did not see the end,’ the man answered, ‘but people said that two Sikhs were the last. They got into that little room there under the wall and fired through the doorway. The Afghans had taken all the other buildings, and they fired across the courtyard at the door, from all sides, but the Sikhs only laughed and kept calling out, “Come on, why don’t you come and kill us? How many Pathans does it take to kill two Sikhs?” At last some Afghans got into the next room and bored through the mud wall, and shot them from the side.’

‘Do you think that is true?’ Guy asked.

‘God knows! The people in the town said it was true, and that they killed many Afghans.’

Russell walked across to the spot. The room was the last of a row of little rooms built against the wall, and used by the native servants; the roof had fallen in, and the room was full of débris; but all round the doorway were scores of bullet-holes, some with bullets still sticking in them. Evidently the doorway had been a special mark for Afghan riflemen. They removed some of the heap which covered the floor, and came upon a human hand and a skull; attached to it was a coil of long black hair, the uncut hair of the Sikh.

As the two young men rode back to their camp they did not speak much. Each of them had seen and heard that day what he would never forget. Their hearts were very hot within them, and a fierce longing for revenge overpowered every other feeling; that would pass away in time. There was something below it that would not pass away,—a deep resolve to die well if death should come; and pride, a rightful pride, in the courage of their countrymen, and a rightful pride too in the dark-eyed soldiers whom it was their privilege to command. War's lessons are not all bad, and the worst of them are those most quickly unlearned.

That night Guy spoke savagely at mess, and he used words which he would hardly have used a month before, words which made the Colonel look up in surprise and disapproval; but he lay on his camp-bed afterwards and wrote to Helen a letter which rejoiced her by its depth and earnestness of feeling. There was no flippancy and want of enthusiasm now. Service was bracing his character. It was what he had wanted to make a man of him.

CHAPTER XXXIII

FIGHTING IN AFGHANISTAN

HELEN LANGLEY was still in Simla. She had arranged to stay there until the cold weather. It was dreary work. Letters from the front came very irregularly; and when they came they were a fortnight old, and she could not help feeling that anything might have happened since they were written. She had no intimate friends in the place except Mrs. Aylmer, and she could not bring herself to accept the good-natured invitations which at first she received from others. Day after day and week after week were passed in the same dull anxious monotony, and to a great extent in solitude. In the afternoon she used to go out for a walk, but she was afraid of becoming a trouble even to Mrs. Aylmer, and as often as not she went alone. She used to come back in the evening when it grew dusk and settle down to her long lonely night.

The day that she received Guy's letter of the 12th October she walked out with Rex for her only companion. She was happier than she had been for a

long time. The campaign had been successful, and apparently it was over. Perhaps now the troops might soon be coming back; and in the meanwhile Guy's letters had become more and more tender and loving. He seemed delighted at the chance of seeing service, but it had made him turn to her more than ever. She felt so much brighter that evening that she faced the people on the Mall, and walked a considerable distance round the hill above the church.

It was a beautiful evening. The rains had long passed away, and the sky was cloudless. The ferns had gone from the trunks and boughs of the trees. The vivid green had slowly faded out of them, and they had become colourless and almost transparent, or touched with exquisite pale shades of brown and yellow; then they had drooped and fallen. The deafening twilight choruses of the cicadas were over too, and the long humming chirrup of the sun-crickets sounded from the branches of the deodars, which were covered with bright upright flower-spikes. As the breeze swept through them it bore away with it clouds of golden pollen.

The air was dry and cold and life-giving. To the northward the snowy range stood out clear and glorious in the light of the setting sun. Helen saw the broad red disc go down behind the western hills, and then stood and watched the snow peaks as the rosy flush faded slowly from them and left them cold and gray.

When she got back to the church the short twilight

was closing in. Across the gap by Tara Devi, where the clouds used to come pouring through in the rains, there now stretched the straight 'cold-weather line' of mist. Above it the sky was still red, and below it, in the gap, a little pool of water caught and reflected the glow. To the right of the gap, over the tall dark head of Prospect Hill, a single planet was shining.

Helen stood for a few minutes gazing at it all. Through that huge mountain gateway Guy had gone, and her eyes had often turned to it in bitter remembrance and longing. This night she could look at it less sadly. The planet brightening in the sunset sky seemed to bring her a message of hope and comfort. 'I wonder whether he is looking at it too!' she said to herself as she turned away.

Guy had been looking at it too, above the stony crest of a rugged Afghan hill, and if it had not brought Helen to his mind he was hardly to be blamed. He had had a long day in the saddle, and was sitting in his sheepskin coat, tired and cold and hungry, by a camp fire of logs, waiting for some food which his servant was getting ready. For the last fortnight the cavalry had had a hard time of it, scouring the country and collecting supplies. It seemed very difficult to get anything, particularly forage, and the winter was coming on fast. The force had only a few days' stock in hand, and once the snow began it would be almost impossible to go on working. Already the nights were cold, and snow had fallen on the hills to the northward. The

fact was, that our difficulties were beginning. The mountain tribes had risen upon the line by which our troops had advanced, and had completely severed our communications with India. An attempt was being made to open the direct line by the Khyber, but here also the tribes were stirring. Rumours of disaffection and disorder came from other quarters also, and the Amir's commander-in-chief reported that the country-side was full of disbanded soldiery with arms in their hands. Everywhere it seemed that the people were excited and sullen. It was not altogether surprising. There was no government. The broken Amir was lying in his tent in the English camp, and would give no orders; his ministers were under arrest; his nobles had little influence for good. No one knew whether the English meant to go or stay, and every one therefore was afraid to do them service. The little English force woke up to find itself in the centre of a shattered and disorganised kingdom, amidst a hostile population. It could get no trustworthy intelligence, and it held nothing but the ground covered by its fire. Meanwhile its presence and its smallness were provoking to the Afghans, who hated the Feringee as they hated the devil. Some few of them hated him even more than they loved his rupees.

Guy Langley's squadron had been as hard worked as any. For the most part it had been on detached duty in the valleys near Kabul, with or without a small force of infantry. Bradford and Guy were the

only officers with it. They were good friends; and the duty was a very useful experience to both of them. They got to know their men more thoroughly, and to learn a hundred little details which can only be learnt in the field, and to understand something of the Afghans and their ways; but it was tiresome work. Both soon got sick of it, and longed for a prospect of some more fighting. The escape of the guilty regiments from the Asmai heights had made the cavalry doubly keen to get another chance. They were returning now from a week's expedition, and were to march into Kabul next day, with a fair amount of grain and forage.

'O Lord!' Guy said with a sigh, 'I wish they'd bring the grub. I'm infernally hungry;' and he twisted his legs away from the fire which was burning them, while his back was half-frozen. Such legs; not beautiful now in long cavalry boots, but swathed in brown *puttees*, and finished up with rough ammunition high-lows. The *puttee* is the most serviceable leg-gear in the world, and so, after a time, one's eye begins to see the latent beauty in it, but it is not striking at first.

Bradford yawned. 'I'm hungry too,' he said. 'I wish we had some liquor. I am not good at teetotalling.'

They had nothing now, not even rum rations, only green commissariat tea.

At last dinner came, a plateful of tinned beef

boiled up with onions, and a loaf of stale commissariat bread. They ate heartily and drank some tea; then they sat round to the fire again and lit their pipes.

‘I’m deuced glad we’re to be back to-morrow,’ Bradford said; ‘and I shan’t be sorry when we get into our quarters. It’s getting cold for tents.’

‘Yes; that little fort the General has given us looks as if it ought to be warm. The walls must be ten feet thick; but I expect it will be beastly dirty. The Afghans are filthy brutes.’

‘Never mind. The first thing is to be warm. One can’t be clean on service, and it doesn’t matter really; you soon get used to being dirty.’

‘Yes, I’ve found that already. How miserable one would have been if one had been done out of one’s tub for a single day in India. Now I don’t care a blow if I go without for two or three.’

‘Rum, isn’t it? And the way one gets used to a flannel shirt and no collar, and sleeping in blankets instead of sheets.’

‘It is funny. I say, I wonder why the General didn’t put the force into the Bala Hissar instead of going down to where our old cantonment was in 1840. Absit Omen.’

‘Oh, it’s a very different thing now. With our breechloaders we could lick any number of hogs in the open. I only wish there was a chance of their attacking us. No such luck this time. Besides, the Bala Hissar is all blown to bits.’

‘What a smash that was!’

‘You saw it go up, didn’t you?’

‘Yes. I was up on the Siah Sung in Dunbar’s tent, and there was a bang outside like a big gun going off. We went out to see what it was, and there was a column of gray smoke hundreds of feet high over the Bala Hissar, and from the bottom of it a cloud of smoke was spreading out over the town. It was a wonderful sight. There was another explosion later in the afternoon,—another column of smoke, black this time, with shells going off in the middle of it. The noise all night of shells and rifle cartridges was like a general action.’

‘I expect it was done on purpose.’

‘Daresay. It was hard luck on poor Shafto and the Ghoorkhas inside.’

They talked on a little longer, and then began to feel sleepy, and turned in. They had no beds, but lay side by side on the floor of their little tent, with a waterproof sheet under each of them.

Next day they marched into Kabul, and were very glad to get back to the regiment. Their winter quarters were not yet ready, but they were ‘in society’ again, and the little mess-tent looked very home-like. MacPherson, who understood these things, and always insisted upon being comfortable on service, had had a pit dug about four feet deep, and the tent was pitched inside this. There was a big earthen fireplace at one end, with a mud chimney outside; and altogether it

was warm and snug, except about the doorway. The only thing they wanted was some liquor, which they were probably much better without.

Guy found some letters awaiting him, and he read a newspaper or two, and heard the gossip of the camp, and was happy. His holiday, however, was not of long duration. A day or two later the regiment was split up again, and this time his squadron formed part of a small force which was sent out to march through some country to the eastward, about the Peshawar road. It was a toilsome march, not relieved by any exciting incident, but Guy went through some fresh country, and had the opportunity of seeing the route followed by our unhappy force on the disastrous retreat of 1842.

That march was full of painful interest. He rode with his squadron through the Khurd Kabul Pass. The road lay for miles along the bed of a shallow stream, which they constantly crossed and recrossed, the horses floundering badly at times among the boulders and water-holes. In every shady corner the stream was already well coated with ice. In places the rocks rose precipitously on either side, and almost met overhead. The Pass could easily have been seized and held, but to push into it an unwieldy mass of troops and followers, without previously clearing the heights, was to ensure a murderous disaster. A few score of matchlock men among the rocks, firing quietly down into the blocked mass below, could not fail to do

fearful execution. As he went, Guy thought of the poor English ladies,—some in sore sorrow for the loss of husband or brother, some great with child, riding through ice and snow and the shower of treacherous Afghan bullets. The idea of Helen in such a position came to him with a sudden vividness that made him draw his breath sharply and clench his fingers on the reins. ‘Thank God, we have no ladies here now!’ he said to himself. ‘What madness it was!’

Bradford and Guy got back to Kabul again before the middle of November. They found things going on much as before, and the force seemed to be getting bored. Supplies were still scarce, particularly forage, and the cold was increasing. The day they rode in there was a fall of snow, and it had begun to lie thickly on the northern hills. There were rumours of trouble in various directions, and in one or two cases small parties of our men had been fired upon, but no real enemy could be found, and no one believed there was going to be fighting. The hogs would not stand and give us a chance; they had ‘no more valour than a wild duck.’ If only we could get a few thousands of them together; but it was hopeless. A company of infantry could go and trail their coats anywhere. Daud Shah, the huge Afghan commander-in-chief, said, ‘Take care; these small expeditions are dangerous.’ But no one minded him; they thought he wanted to stop the foraging.

It really was very wearisome. The exposure and

fatigue and reaction were telling on men and horses alike. Even the General's roan mare looked like a greyhound, and all but the real soldiers were beginning to grumble and wish themselves back in India. If they could have any fighting, *à la bonne heure*; but even a few weeks of discomfort without fighting had been quite enough for many. It struck Guy Langley as strange. He was young, and he had enough romance in his character to enjoy the picturesque side of the thing. Moreover, his soldierly feeling and the indolent tenacity within him had been stirred. He could not understand men longing to get away now who had been mad to go on service two months before. Nevertheless he saw that it was so.

The cold got more and more severe. Long before the end of the month it was freezing hard in the shade all day long, and Guy's stirrup irons made his feet ache. One morning he tried to write a letter, and found his ink a solid block.

Then they had to go out again. A famous old Mullah, or fanatic priest, was said to be stirring up the faithful in the country to the south, and his emissaries were causing trouble nearer at hand. Some of the village headmen in the neighbouring valleys began to show signs of hostility and to obstruct the collection of supplies. This kind of thing must be stopped. Our troops must be seen again.

As the little force to which Guy's squadron was attached marched away westward he had plenty of

time to look about him. They rode for hours through a great valley dotted with villages, that is to say, with square mud forts of various sizes, their corners crowned with towers. The flat ground was cut up by irrigation channels and straight rows of poplar trees, now quite bare of leaves. From the main valley small branches ran up into the barren treeless hills which surrounded it on all sides.

The cold was bitter. There was no snow, but a keen wind was blowing, and everything was frozen hard. Altogether a bleak and wintry prospect; and yet, looking away to the northward over the blue ranges to the grand line of snowy peaks, Guy Langley thought it was a view he would not have missed. Behind, through the bare gray valley, the little column of infantry wound slowly along, the wintry sunlight glinting here and there on the frozen steel.

The force spent a cheerless night in camp, and then marched on again, reaching its destination about mid-day. The cavalry were sent on a few miles in advance to escort a Political Officer, who was going to pay a visit to one of the principal headmen of the neighbourhood. The man was suspected of disaffection, and it was thought desirable to see what he was about; if he gave trouble he was to be arrested.

Bradford was getting tired now. 'By George!' he said with a sigh, as they mounted again after a short halt for lunch, 'we shall have had enough of it by the time we get back to-night. This pottering about at a

walk all day long knocks up the horses worse than anything, and the men too. I wish we could get a little real work to cheer them up; they are getting stale. We shall have some of them down soon.'

They rode on for an hour or so along a rough stony track, and then arrived at the mouth of a narrow valley between two rocky spurs. There were three or four villages of the usual type in the valley. The headmen lived in the largest of them, under the hill-side.

Douglas, the Political Officer, who knew the ground, pointed out their road, which lay along the right of the valley near the hill-side. They went on, Bradford and Douglas riding together, Guy a few paces behind with old Gulab Singh. They passed the smaller forts at some little distance on their left and saw no one about, but a little farther on two or three men showed themselves for a moment on one of the side spurs to the right.

'I wonder what those fellows were doing,' Guy said.

Gulab Singh was looking at them attentively. 'God knows, Sahib,' he said; 'but I think we had better take care. There may be some devilry up. The valley seems empty, as if they had sent their women and children away.'

Guy was riding up to Bradford to ask whether he had seen the men when several more appeared on a little spur which jutted into the valley in front of

them. The road wound round the base of the spur, and the advanced guard were within a hundred yards of it.

‘Hullo! what does that mean?’ Bradford said, pulling up his horse and taking out a pair of glasses. ‘I think they have got rifles,’ he added, after a good look at them.

Douglas had a look too and agreed. ‘I daresay they are only frightened,’ he said; ‘but they may mean mischief.’

The words were hardly out of his mouth when all doubt was dissipated. The main body of the cavalry had halted in the road about two hundred yards from the hill-side, which at this point was quite bare, but high and rugged and covered with huge rocky masses. As Douglas spoke a sudden volley was fired from among the rocks. Two horses were struggling on the ground, and for an instant it seemed to Guy as if a swarm of bees were whizzing about his ears. There were a few seconds of confusion among the Sikhs, and a considerable number of the enemy sprang up with loud shouts and opened a galling fire upon them. The thing was very prettily planned, and the surprise was complete. The squadron got off with remarkably little loss,—one man wounded and three horses killed; but there was nothing for it but to retire and leave the enemy in possession, for directly the firing began more of them showed themselves, and before long there were several hundreds with half a dozen green and red flags.

They waved their swords and shouted ; and one man, with a Snider rifle, went on firing steadily, his bullets knocking up the dust near them.

Bradford was very angry, and sent off a *sowar* at a gallop with a note to the officer commanding the force, asking for infantry ; but he soon realised that it was too late. They could not arrive much before dark, when it would be useless to attack. The punishment must be deferred till next day. The squadron fired a few rounds with their carbines, which had the effect of making the enemy shout derisively and lie down behind the rocks ; then they reconnoitred the ground as completely as possible. The gates of the smaller forts were closed, and no one was to be seen in or about them.

As Bradford had expected, the *sowar* soon came back with a message to the effect that it was too late to do anything, and that the cavalry were to return to camp. They rode back in impotent wrath, but the brush had done them good. Officers and men were excited and eager now ; there would be a fight next day. Even the wounded man was cheerful, and keen for further work, though his *puttees* were covered with congealed blood. ‘It’s nothing, Sahib,’ he said ; ‘the bullet only went through a bit of my leg ; I can ride all right.’

They were to be disappointed again. The camp was struck at daybreak, and the force moved off, but after a rapid march they arrived only to find the

valley deserted; not a man was to be seen near the forts or on the hills. The neighbouring spurs were crowned by the infantry, and the cavalry rode over the open *kotuls*, and round on both sides of the valley; there was not a sign of an enemy. Then it was decided that the deserted villages must be as far as possible destroyed, and this was done. The massive wooden gates were forced, and the insides thoroughly searched. Not a human being was found in them, but in the corner towers, and in some of the little rooms under the wall, were stores of fuel and grain and chopped straw. There was not carriage enough to remove it, and it was all set on fire. Soon a thick smoke was rising from the forts, and streaming away to the southward. On the sky-line of the hills to the north, miles away, they saw men gathering, and through their glasses they made out two or three hundred with some flags; they were quite out of reach.

Guy was standing with Bradford on a stony *kotul* above the main fort. He had dismounted, and had been stamping up and down to keep his feet warm, while a *sowar* held his horse. 'What a sell this is!' he said; 'I'm afraid it is hopeless. They will never give us a chance.'

Bradford was sitting moodily on a big stone, with his pipe in his mouth, and one hand deep in the breast of his *posteen*; he growled out something about 'skunks.'

‘I wonder,’ Guy went on, ‘whether this game is any good. It seems to me that it must rile them horridly, and yet not hit them hard enough to frighten them. Besides, you can’t tell whether you hit the men who do the mischief. I suppose there would always be some reckless devils about who would snipe at us if they got a chance, even if they knew it would make us burn some one else’s village; I expect we should do the same. Supposing England were invaded by Afghans, and we saw a few cavalry within range, I know my feeling would be, “Oh, blow Jones’s haystack! Let’s have a shy at them;” and then the unhappy Jones would suffer while I sat and smiled on the summit of a neighbouring hill. After that Jones would shoot too.’¹

‘They were all in it,’ Bradford said; ‘they had sent away the women and children, and were ready for us.’

‘That may have been merely funk.’

‘Perhaps. Anyway, they are cowardly beasts who won’t fight, and they deserve anything they get.’

Guy laughed. ‘Oh, I quite agree there! It is beastly unsporting of them to scratch after we have come all this way.’

When the villages were thoroughly in flames the troops marched back to camp, and after a day or two they returned to Kabul. They had not seen another

¹ It is still a Highland proverb, ‘He whose house is burnt must become a soldier.’—*Legend of Montrose*.

shot fired, and were very weary of the cold and wind and dust.

On return Guy's squadron got into their quarters, and found themselves very snug indeed. The little fort had required a good deal of cleaning and fitting up, but it was in order now, and after tents it was deliciously warm. They had a large store of wood, chiefly beams from dismantled buildings in the Bala Hissar, and they could keep up rousing fires, and have hot tubs and be clean again; it was real luxury. Guy had a little room to himself, and he bought a felt carpet for it in the Kabul Bazar, and had a good solid bed made, not like his wretched little camp-bed, which was always breaking down under him, and a small table and chair. He could sit and read at night, or write to Helen, before a blazing fire. It was much pleasanter than freezing in a windy tent where one could hardly keep a candle burning, and where your only bath was a hole in the ground, with a waterproof sheet in it. Then they had a jolly little mess, and plenty to eat. They were able to get vegetables and fruit in the town, and plum-cakes with pistachio nuts in them, and shortbread, and flat unleavened loaves, and great jars of apricot jam. Those who cared for it could even get bad Afghan wine and spirit, the latter tasting like concentrated essence of dried raisins. Altogether, they lived like fighting cocks, and though there was still plenty of work to be done they were very happy.

December came, and with it increasing rumours of risings in all directions. On the first of the month, in the darkness of the early morning, the wretched Amir went off to India under a guard of English troops; and from this time the reports became more and more frequent and circumstantial. Still no one seemed to believe that serious trouble was coming, and when some Hindus in the city mooted the idea that Kabul itself might be attacked their fears were treated as utterly ridiculous. Daud Shah said the insurgents meant to attack our cantonments, but this provoked laughter. The one desire of the force was to get enough of the enemy together to make a fight of it. 'I would sit still and let the hogs gather,' MacPherson said. 'If we keep moving out troops directly we hear of two or three hundred men dancing about on a hill-top with a green rag, we shall never get them to stand. We ought to lie still and encourage them to come round us until there are a respectable lot, and then make a dash at them with a good force of cavalry and some guns and bag the whole boiling.' The sentiment was generally approved.

One morning a day or two later, having nothing to do before breakfast, Guy and Lawrence determined to stroll over to the cantonment and see whether they could pick up any news or letters. Their little fort was six or seven hundred yards from the western side of the cantonment, and they walked towards the western gateway, which was the General's head-

quarters. When they were within twenty yards of it two men came out, and breaking into a trot went swinging past them. One was a well-built, athletic man, with a clean-shaved face, in clerical black; every one knew Pádre Adams, now a Victoria Cross. The other was a big man with a brown beard.

‘Who is that?’ Lawrence said, as they came up.

‘Oh, Durand. He’s a Political; one of the fellows Government send up to interfere with us and prevent us doing our business.’ Then he called out, ‘Any news, Durand?’

The man addressed turned his head over his shoulder and called back, ‘No, nothing.’

‘Confound him!’ Guy said; ‘they always make a secret of everything.’

It was freezing again, and there was a little frozen pool near the gateway. Guy walked over it, and then they both went back and had a slide. After two or three successful attempts Guy’s heels went up, and he came down heavily.

‘Hurt?’ Lawrence asked.

‘No,’ he answered, struggling up and dusting his breeches; ‘but everything is confoundedly hard in this country. Come on.’

They walked into the covered gateway, and saw standing at a door on the right the Chief of the Staff, Macgregor, a powerful man with short legs and a massive frame, a commanding face and thick, crisp, copper-coloured hair, now touched with gray. His

nose was aquiline, and he wore a moustache and pointed beard, like a French soldier of the Second Empire. He was peeling an apple with a penknife, and singing to himself in a deep, low voice. They saluted him, and he stopped singing and nodded, and said, 'Morning,' gruffly. He was too big a man to speak to, so they passed on.

Outside the gateway Colonel Hastings, the Chief Political Officer, a tall man with a big, fair moustache, was talking to a long, furtive-looking Mahometan. Hastings returned their salute very courteously, with a pleasant smile in his blue eyes, but they left him alone too.

A few yards farther on, in the sunshine, they found Neville Chamberlain, of the Central India Horse, one of the General's aides-de-camp. He was stamping up and down and whistling cheerfully.

'Any news, Chamberlain?' Guy said.

'Yes, dear boy; fifty thousand Russians marching down from Turkestan, and the General was just going to send for you to take command of the Cavalry Brigade. He feels this is not a time for trifling. By Jove! here he comes; you had better stop and get your orders.'

Guy looked up and saw the well-known figure of the General, as trim and smart as if he were at Aldershot, coming out of his own doorway. The boys saluted and walked off, leaving the laughing aide-de-camp to meet his Chief, who called out to

them: 'Good morning, Langley; good morning, Lawrence.'

'Isn't it extraordinary how he knows our names?' Lawrence said, as they got out of earshot. 'Of course he saw you at Simla; but how does he know me?'

'Oh, everybody knows you; that's what comes of being such a good-looking beggar.'

'Don't be an ass. Don't you think it's odd?'

'Very. He is awfully good at that; all great men are, or pretend to be. Come on, we'll go to the post-office and see if there are any letters, and then try to get hold of Hensman of the *Pioneer*; he always knows everything.'

They looked into the little post-office tent, but there were no letters. Then they went on and found the war-correspondent. He had been playing whist until past midnight, and then writing until four o'clock, and was now rather fresher than usual, with clear eyes and an innocent, child-like colour. He told them all the news there was,—nothing very definite, but more rumours of gatherings here and there.

They walked back to their quarters rather disappointed. 'Same old game,' Guy said; 'risings on all sides, and not a fight to be got out of them at any price. Water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink. I believe the whole thing is skittles; those infernal Politicals getting their legs pulled. We shall never see another shot fired.'

On the morning of the 8th of December there was a

review on the open plain behind our cantonments, and such of the Afghans as cared to look on had an opportunity of seeing how small was the force which had seized their capital. There were less than five thousand men on the ground; they were beautiful troops, but they were few, too few, and the little serried line looked lost in that broad plain.

In the afternoon Baillie's Horse were out again, the whole regiment together this time. There was a small gathering of malcontents to the west of Kabul, fifteen hundred or two thousand men; and two brigades had been sent off to try and surround them, and prevent their being joined by tribesmen from the north. Baillie's Horse went with General MacPherson's brigade.

No one expected any fighting; there had been too many false alarms; and they were all surprised when, on the 10th of December, they found themselves in presence of some thousands of Afghans who had come down from the north to join the gathering. A number of banners were flying on the hill-tops, and our cavalry were received with a fire which forced them to fall back.

Then the infantry advanced and attacked the enemy in form. Guy enjoyed the sight; it was pretty to watch the shells bursting over the swarms of men on the hill-sides, and the lines of rifle-puffs creeping up to them. But it was not a very hard business, and the regiment did not get a chance. The flat

ground below the hills was cut up with watercourses and enclosures, among which cavalry could not act with effect ; no luck again.

The next day the dulness was over with a vengeance. Marching southward, in pursuance of the plan to surround the original gathering, MacPherson's force became aware that a smart action was going on in the direction of Kabul, and swinging round towards the sound and smoke of the guns, they came in the afternoon upon the field where the action had been fought. It had evidently not ended in our favour.

The ground was deserted now, but as the brigade pressed eagerly forward the cavalry came upon some wounded horses limping painfully about the plain, and then upon a more painful token of defeat,—the bodies of some English dead, horribly mutilated by Afghan knives.

The despised gathering of fifteen hundred or two thousand men had suddenly risen to at least ten thousand, and leaving in its rear the brigades sent to surround it, had dashed straight at Kabul. A small force of cavalry and guns which tried to stop it had been overthrown, and nothing but the extreme narrowness of the gorge behind which Kabul lay had saved the city from falling that night into the hands of the rebels.

It was a bold stroke, and deserved success. If, instead of making for the city, the enemy had only pushed on towards the English cantonment, with its

weak garrison and its precious stores of ammunition and food, they might have dealt us a deadly blow. As it was, Baillie's Horse learned with something akin to amazement that an Afghan force had received and repulsed a charge delivered by two squadrons of British cavalry, and had actually for a time captured four horse-artillery guns. It was a bolt from the blue.

Nevertheless, as they sat round their fire that night and speculated on the chances of the morrow, they were in the best of spirits. The Ninth Lancers had suffered severely, and the ill-treatment of our dead was such as to arouse a fiery thirst for vengeance; but we had not been disgraced by the struggle against such hopeless odds, and the morrow would give us a chance of inflicting a heavy punishment. The enemy were there in force, occupying the hills south of Kabul. There must be some real work now.

There was plenty of work during the next three days. On the 12th of December we did little more than hold our own and keep the enemy in play, but that evening the second of our detached brigades marched in, and on the 13th the enemy's position was seriously attacked.

It was a real soldier's day, with a quantity of fine mixed fighting to suit all tastes. The guns shelled the enemy's positions, and the infantry stormed one after another the rugged heights upon which their banners were planted; and the cavalry fell upon them

in the open ground to the east and west. To do them justice, they fought boldly, advancing into the plain and trying with their great numbers to envelop our attacking force, and receiving with much steadiness the onslaughts of our small bodies of horsemen. Unfortunately there was never an opportunity of striking a heavy blow with a mass of cavalry together, but there were a number of separate actions in different parts of the field.

Our squadrons charged repeatedly, and got well home, doing much execution and suffering some loss. It was difficult to say who showed most keenness and dash,—the magnificent English troopers of the Ninth, or the rough, strong fighting men of the Guides and Fifth Punjab Cavalry, or the picturesque *sowars* of the Fourteenth Bengal Lancers,—all seemed to be enjoying their work and doing it well.

In one of these affairs Baillie's Horse were particularly successful. A large body of the enemy, seeing that the bulk of our cavalry were already engaged, pushed out from the hills to the south, and made an effort to get round our left. Baillie's Horse were sent at them, and a very warm time every one had of it.

Graham divided his regiment, and came down upon the enemy with beautiful precision, from two sides at once, just in time to cut them off from some broken ground they were trying to gain. He had tempted them out of one bad piece into the open, and he waited

until it seemed as if he were going to let them get across unmolested. Guy was beginning to chafe impatiently at seeing them stream away, firing and shouting defiantly. One or two horses were hit, and the Sikhs began to grumble. Then, exactly at the right moment, the Colonel turned, his tall figure very erect, and his handsome Scotch face alight with pleasure, and gave the word they were longing to hear. They advanced at a trot, and then he pointed at the enemy with his sword and sat down and rode, as if he were riding for a spear. And with a wild shout the three troops went after him.

What a mad gallop it was! Faster and faster over the level ground, with the enemy's swarms running across their front, and the thin charging lines opening and doubling and losing all regularity in their eagerness. It was all Guy could do to keep in front of his Sikhs. He turned right and left in his saddle to see if they were all going in straight. Going in straight! There was a long broken line of racing horses and glittering lance points and eager eyes. God help the Afghan who got in their way!

It was beautifully done. The enemy were caught on the move, without cover of any kind, and smitten on both flanks. Their very numbers had betrayed them, and now their numbers increased their loss. They met the charge with much confidence. When they saw the cavalry were really coming on, their moving swarms began to halt and thicken into knots,

and some of these little bodies of men held their fire until our horsemen were within a few yards. Guy Langley rode straight at one cluster, and was received with a volley of fire and smoke which nearly blinded him. The next instant he was into them with a crash, and he and his Sikhs were riding hither and thither in the smoke and confusion, slashing and spearing like men possessed. How long it lasted Guy never knew, but there were some minutes of it, during which all order seemed to be lost. At one moment he found himself close to Lawrence, who had come in with the other wing under MacPherson, and was now riding bareheaded through the rout, followed by two or three of his men. 'Come on, Lawrie,' Guy cried out, '*Floreat Etona!*' As he spoke Lawrence's horse went down head first, killed by a shot from two or three Afghans who had turned and fired in desperation. The boy was on his feet in a second, before Guy could turn to his help, and avoiding a downward stroke aimed at his head, he had driven his sword right through his assailant's chest and killed him. It was a close shave.

A minute more and all was over. The Afghans had got away, backwards or forwards, into rough ground, leaving seventy dead on the open plain, and the cavalry re-formed and retired out of fire of the walls and ditches. The horses were very blown, and five or six had been killed. MacPherson was wounded, but not badly,—a slash on the left arm. One *sowar*

had been shot dead, and one pulled off his horse and killed with sword-cuts. Half a dozen more were wounded more or less severely. Guy himself found that his breeches had been blackened with smoke, and there was a piece out of his right sleeve which looked like a cut.

It had been a very warm thing altogether, and the regiment was pleased with itself. MacPherson had carried out his part of the work thoroughly well, as ever. He was grumbling now at not having killed more of the hogs, but he was fairly satisfied. Guy's Sikhs were laughing and talking aloud with happiness. ' *Shábásh !* ' old Gulab Singh said, ' *Shábásh !* That was a fine *tamásha*. We killed a thousand of them without doubt. All the young men are *bahádurs*. The Sahib killed more than ten or twenty himself. I saw him.'

Nevertheless, when sunset came, the enemy were not yet beaten. We had shelled them, and stormed their positions, and ridden them down in the open, but they had caused us some loss ; and their numbers, far from decreasing, were growing fast. That evening, when the force was back in cantonments, they could see upon the bare hill-tops, against the darkening sky, bodies of men streaming down from the north to join the holy war. In the gloom they looked huge and ghostly, like a moving wood.

Next morning they held the nearer hills within a mile of the cantonment. The fighting of the day

before had had no effect. The fiery cross had gone round, and the clans were gathering still.

Then it began again. The cavalry moved out across the plain to the westward, and the infantry stormed the rugged Asmai height, and a considerable number of the fugitives were killed. But as our people stood, exhausted and few, on the peaks they had won, they saw all round them the valleys swarming with armed men; and soon the enemy came on, tens of thousands of them, with their leaders in front, waving their banners of green and white and red. They swarmed up the steep hill-sides, confident in their overwhelming numbers, and careless of the loss inflicted by the slight lines of breechloaders.

Then at last it was recognised that for the time we could do no more. The odds were too great. The little force was not sufficient both to hold the cantonment securely and to attack the enemy in the open. For a time at least we must concentrate and stand on the defensive. In the afternoon the order was given, and before dark all the troops were inside the cantonment walls. Baillie's Horse had even to abandon their own little fort, with its precious stores of forage and fuel. The city of Kabul of course must fall into the hands of the rebels.

That evening our people found it very difficult to realise the truth of what had happened. A week before no one had believed we should have any fighting. The one desire of all had been to find an enemy

who would make some sort of a stand. Suddenly we had found ourselves savagely attacked, and after five days' fighting and a loss of three hundred killed and wounded, we had been fairly mobbed into retreat and pressed back behind our walls.

It was rather an anxious night. The troops were tired, but many of them had to turn out to guard the long cantonment against an attack. Meanwhile the gates were rapidly blocked with gun-limbers and other obstacles, and the Engineers toiled all night to protect the open rear with trenches and wire entanglements and the like. Before daybreak our communications with India were severed by the cutting of the telegraph-line. The victorious force which had taken Kabul was now itself besieged. The hogs had turned upon us to some purpose. An Indian force ought to have known that the hog is a dangerous enemy.

The huge Afghan commander-in-chief sat in his fur coat and drank quantities of green tea, and said to all who spoke to him, 'Sahib, did I not tell you all along?' But they said he was in it, and put him under arrest. Perhaps he was.

MacPherson was very angry. They had shot his horse the last day, and it had fallen on him and hurt his leg, and he had never once 'got in.' His wound was rather painful too; he sat in the new cold mess-tent with a gloomy face, in silence.

It was all rather funny, Guy thought,—humiliating, but rather funny. He preserved a serious aspect and

did not say so, but at last Colonel Graham gave the line.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘we have done our best, and things might be much worse.’ There was a twinkle in his eyes as he went on. ‘It has been a lesson to me, and to some more of us, I think. You were afraid they would disperse without fighting, Langley, when you came down from Simla. Are you satisfied now?’

‘Quite, thank you, Colonel,’ Guy answered with a laugh, and they made merry over their own discomfiture. After all, they were not disgraced, and it was just as well to take the thing cheerfully.

END OF VOL. II



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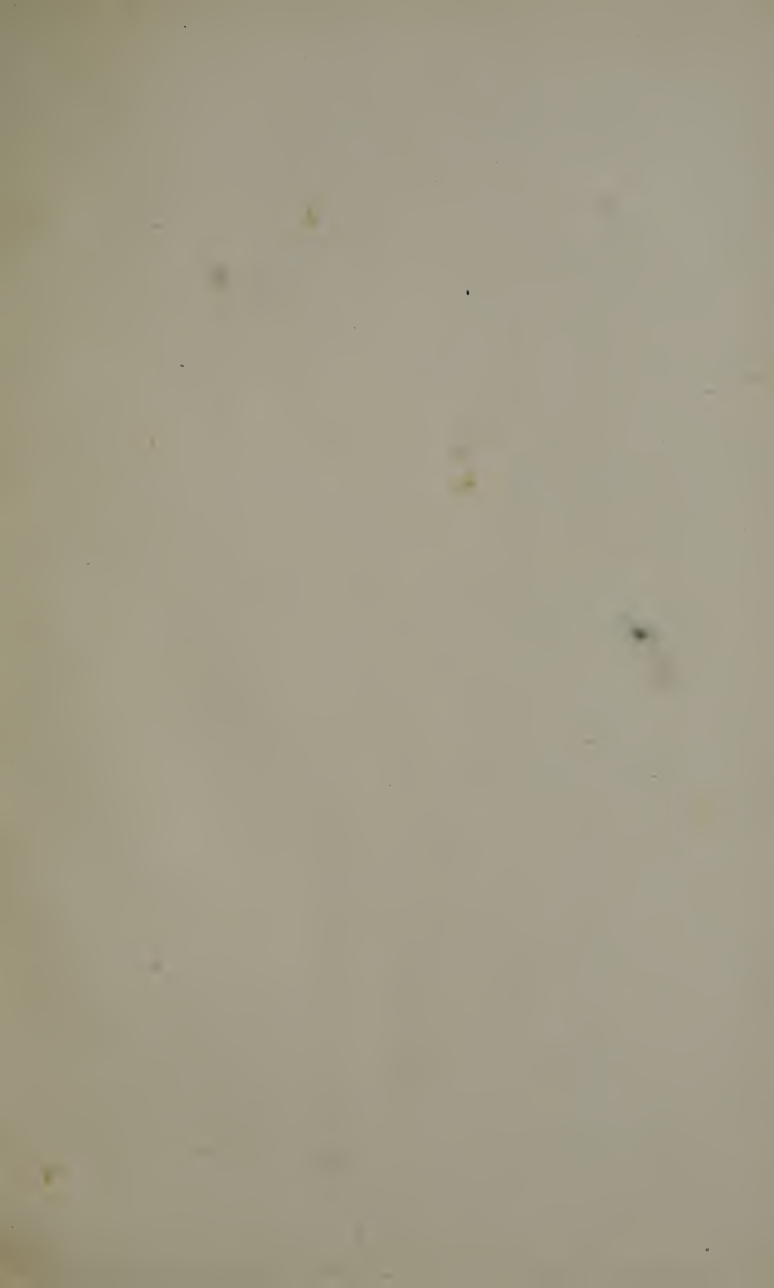
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